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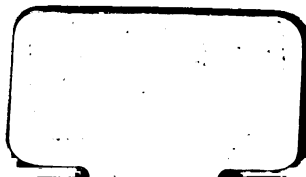
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THE ROUA PASS;  
OR,  
ENGLISHMEN IN THE HIGHLANDS.

BY  
ERICK MACKENZIE.

IN THREE VOLUMES.

VOL. II.



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CHAPTER I.

LOVE AND INTRIGUE.

What means a' this scorning, my lassie?  
An' what means thae look o' disdain?  
It was nae your wont to be saucy;  
It is nae your nature I ken.

. . . . .  
I'm but a puir hand at beseeching,  
And words hae nae mony to spare.

GILFILLAN.

ON one of the Dreumah hills, within sight of the Lodge, lived a shepherd named Donald Cameron, in a cottage with his only daughter Jeanie and his old father Ian Mohr. The latter was one of the few remaining grandsires



who could tell of former times, which he fondly recalled, when the Highlands were the Highlands where bird and beast roamed free, and unclaimed save by those who could match the stag in swiftness of foot; when lairds knew not of shooting-rents, dreamt not of emigration, and dealt not with strangers; and when clansmen were still clansmen to each other.

Old Ian Mohr, when a lad, had swam across Loch Nightach in icy winter neck and neck beside the grand uncle of Glenbenrough, carrying lighted pine torches to fire the house of a recusant tenant. It was he who saved the life of his present laird's mother when a girl, from the fury of a maddened Highland bull, by leaping across the chasm of Corloo Craig, with her in his arms; and when the country people spoke of the death of the Edinburgh writer who was shot at the front door of Arduashien, as he stood there with a writ against Normal's great grandfather, old Ian always muttered, "Our bullet was sure! our bullet was sure!"

Ian Mohr, still, at the age of eighty-three, could shoot a deer and spear a salmon with the surest aim. It was wondrous to see his wrinkled old head watching immoveably a pass, his small keen eyes far sighted as in youth, and his old puckered hands quite untremulous as they held the double gun, with his finger on the trigger. His keenness in sport was the ruling passion that seemed to stave off infirmity; and the whole district of young and old pointed almost reverently to the veteran Ian Mohr—an emblem of the prowess of ancient days—whose rugged strength seemed likely yet to last through many winters.

He had nearly died two years before the events of this story, owing to the advent of the Dreumah party. Ian Mohr, after a lifetime's liberty, found himself suddenly debarred from fishing and shooting. English gamekeepers pounced down upon him by the water's edge, and, after sharp personal conflict, broke his beloved birchen scobie\* in two. In stalking

\* Trout rod.

a deer, he saw himself stalked, and the deer sent flying out of range ; and then sharp messages came down to his cottage, and he was told he would be sent to the distant county jail.

The privation of his loved sports nearly broke the old man's heart ; he took to his low, dark bed in the recess of the wall, and turning his face away said he wished to die : he had lived too long, since these times were come. For a week he scarcely ate or drank, and loudly and bitterly was sympathy expressed in many a Gaelic voice. However, Ian Mohr was yet too strong. One morning at early sunrise his grand-daughter laid, as if accidentally, a new scobie on the bed ; and she and her father saw him grasp it eagerly. He got up, and crept out of the house, and in an hour returned, with a broad grin brightening his wrinkled face. He asked for his breakfast, and then whispered to the lassie to go to the river bank ; where she found a salmon and four large trout, hidden carefully in some reeds. From that day he recovered : a new impetus seem'd given to his

life. The fact of the sassenachs calling sport poaching delighted and excited him: he would fish and shoot in spite of them, and outwit them too by cunning and speed.

Glenbenrough and other neighbouring lairds propitiated the forbearance of the English sporting tenants; and even the gamekeepers, entering into the spirit of the old man's defiant pursuit of sport, and amused by his eccentric contempt of the game-laws, enhanced his pleasures a thousand fold by pretending redoubled vigilance, and constant feints of discomfited pursuit. Had Ian discovered that this was the case, and that he was not poaching in earnest, he would have sunk completely; for his pride would have utterly rebelled against accepting permission from these new innovators of the soil: the only zest left to him now was that of following his game in spite of them.

Jeanie Cameron was a rosy-cheeked, dark-eyed girl, who from her early years, when she had attended the parish school with Ewen Mackenzie, had in a manner been betrothed

to him ; but, like many Scotch courtships it was one more steady in length of duration than demonstrative in warmth of feeling. Florh, with unusual justice towards her elder son Huistan, always told Ewen she could not give him the necessary plenishing for a house, nor assistance in money, until she saw his elder brother with a wife of his own. Whenever this desirable event should take place (and it was one of which there seemed no present probability,) she would retire with her savings to a croft of her own, and receive Ewen and Jeanie to share bread and shelter with her.

Ewen's love for Jeanie was deep ; but divided almost equally with that for his mother and his young master, Arduashien : yet the sullenness of his nature showed in this too ; and many roughnesses troubled the current of his love, which rarely ran smooth.

One day at noon, towards the end of September, Ewen entered Jeanie's cottage : he was on his way from Arduashien to Glenbenrough, but had made a *detour* so as to visit his love,

whom he had scarcely met since the days of his Dreumah gillieship. Jeanie was spinning at her wheel as he entered. Their greeting and conversation was in Gaelic, but might be pretty closely translated as follows :

"An' what brought ye here the day, lad?" Jeanie asked, looking up and showing no pleasurable surprise.

"My feet, lass," Ewen replied sulkily, as he removed his cap and seated himself by the fire : "is na a sight o' me guid for sair een?"

"Aye, but mine were na sair for you," Jeanie retorted. This was a strange turn of the tables for Ewen : generally on his side lay the ill-humour, requiring forbearance from his mistress. He answered to her retort,

"An' what for no?"

"Ye did na stay lang near me when it was in your power, Ewen."

He scowled darkly and replied with vehemence, "No! an' is it you that wad hae me serve the sassenach, lick his hand like a dog, an' do his bidding? No! not for sake o' life,

woman. He raised his hand to me once — not lang syne — it'll no be forgot: let him take care, or an hour may come when my arm might upraise and hurl him like a gled o'er the steepest craig in the north!"

"Is it Mr. Marchmoram? He's a fine gentlemen, and a purty man," Jeanie said drily.

Ewen gave her a lowering look: "An' what ken ye o' him?"

"I ken he's aye ceevil spoken an' kind to the poor, an' that there's wealth o' guid about him."

"Has he gien you any o' it? Was it his kindness that sent the old man's back to the wa'? Will Ian Mohr lay his gun at the feet of the sassenach till he trample it?"

"Grandfather is doited against all new comers; an' ye ken weel it's to humour him, an' frae kindness, that the keepers dinna get leave to hinder him more: Mr. Marchmoram is kind an' guid."

"By my throth, I think ye must hae ta'en my place in his service!" Ewen retorted with a bitter sneer.

"That would be piper's news indeed," Jeanie replied, and tossing her head in time to the measure, she burst forth into a Gaelic song:

"'Twine weel the bonny tweal,  
Twist weel the plaidie;  
O' I'll loe the laddie weel  
That'll wear this tartan plaidie.'

"I'm going now, wi' your leave, the way o' Dreumah to see is my father coming," and rising from her wheel, she turned to the door.

Ewen, snatching up his cap, brushed past her, saying,

"Lass, had I stayed at Dreumah ye wad hae liked it, then? I value the love and the pride that ye maun have sae lang had in me! I loe not you, nor them, the better for it!"

Without pausing for reply, Ewen pursued swiftly the way towards Lochandhu. He had not gone far when he suddenly stopped, jerked his plaid irritably on to the shoulder, hesitated a moment, and then retraced his course partly, by going in a slanting direction across the hills upwards. After about a mile's steep rough as-



cent he topped one of them, and began a precipitous descent upon Loch Nightach, which lay beneath; the water looking dark, cold, and sullen as usual. Ewen went scrambling and stumbling down, but straight as an arrow, for the water's edge: arrived there, he sat down, and, with lowering brow, glanced warily far and near on all around. It was at any time a gloomy eerie place: nature on a gigantic scale lay dark-hued there. Not a vestige of human life was seen, nor was there an echo of human sound; some distant black-faced sheep stared at him from the opposite hills, and the bay of a kenneled hound at Dreumah occasionally broke the stillness. The Lodge lay to the back of the Loch, quite out of view.

Ewen began deliberately to strip himself, and then he plunged into the water, which was many fathom deep at the edge: the bank was high, and gravelly, but it shelved there. He went swimming fast for about a hundred yards, until a little inlet appeared in the almost perpendicular side, where a large birch which grew

above sent its tendrils sweeping so far down to the water's edge that they hid the opening from any but a close view. Into this Ewen went, and standing waist deep in the water he dislodged a large stone above his head; a puff of smoke issued forth from the aperture, and a guttural exclamation in Gaelic along with it.

"Sa caraid ha an!"\* replied Ewen quietly, and immediately a brawny arm, naked and covered with reddish hair, was thrust out, and Ewen, clinging to it, partly clambered and was partly dragged in.

It was a large low cave, perfectly dry and air tight, formed in the steep base of the hill; the ground was covered with withered heather, and heaps of it, piled with other brushwood and peat, lay against the wall. A large smouldering turf fire burnt in the centre, and holes bored in the roof amongst the roots of the birch tree above allowed the smoke to escape, so that it went curling up and lost itself midst the

\* "It's a friend."

light thick foliage, thus escaping all outward observation.

Seated beside a large vat of fresh distilled spirit was old Ian Mohr, Jeanie Cameron's grandfather, his snowy hair and beard, uncombed, straggling over his bending shoulders; his old brown plaid, smelling strong of peat reek, was spread before him, and he was emptying out soaking bags of steeped barley upon it. The moment Ewen's footing within was fairly attained, Donald Cameron again plunged his naked arms into the tub of soft water, in which the barley was shortly to be immersed. He was a thick set, red whiskered, red faced, short nosed Highlander, with a stolid taciturn expression, but a twinkle in the eye that showed he was far from being asleep to what was going on around him. He might have been noticed as one of the most austere attentive on any Sunday at Lochnamoke Church; and Dr. Macconochie had a high opinion of him, as a saving, self-denying, acute Presbyterian. Donald was taciturn by habit, but the necessary quiet of

a smuggling den rendered him especially so here.

The size of the vats and of the copper pan on the fire, and the evident skill and labour bestowed in the economy of the process of distillation, showed on what a complete and extensive scale work was carried on. A stream of water which formerly trickled overhead into the Loch, had been diverted from its course into the cave, and fell in a small waterfall over great part of the worm, which extended from the copper pan on the fire to a large covered vessel in a corner.

Ewen, who, since his entrance, had not spoken to either until he had dragged some clothing from off a heather bed and partly covered himself, now proceeded to replace the damp blankets which were wound around that part of the worm \* which the waterfall did not touch, and he addressed Donald in a low tone.

\* On the length of the worm, which must be always kept damp so as to condense the steam within it, depends the superiority of the spirit: if short, which is more economical, the spirit is harsh though strong.

"Ye'll hae to get Shawm Mac Gilivray to take my place. I'm no going to carry on any more the year."

"Hout awa?" replied his future father-in-law in a tone of cross interrogation.

"No, I canna; I'm going back to Arduashien the morn."

"Ye're daft: the foreshott will be finished by next Sabbath!"

"I canna help it. Shawm will cask it as weel as me; but I want to ken what day after ye'll deliver yon keg at Dreumah that ye're going to sell them?"

"Aye, plenty siller, plenty siller to charge for it. It's Donald kens how to charge them!" chuckled old Ian Mohr.

"Nae work, nae share, Ewen," replied Donald Cameron sulkily. "I'm to gie Ralph the keeper a braw keg full this day week: it's he that ordered it, and he that'll pay for it."

"Aye, his master is no to ken where it came from," old Ian Mohr continued, laughing: "it's the rael mountain dew; he kens that, but neither

he nor his man kens how near to them it is gathered. Oh, the brews that I hae seen, baith made and drank, in this very place! No one ever could come in here wha was na a souple lad and a guid swimmer: I was that, nigh sixty years ago."

"It's for the chief o' the Dreumah herd the whisky's for, is it no?" Ewen again inquired; "an' he means to tak it to England wi' him."

"Sae I believe," Donald replied shortly.

"Well, he had better tak care the gaugers don't get it first."

"Aye, indeed," said Ian Mohr, "they'll be swooping in this direction afore long, I'm sure; it's sae long since they were here: they never get anything to come for. See, Donald and I are ready, though: there's the little meal girdel will keep us in parritch and bannocks; there's our beds dry and warm; and there's the stuff that will comfort us, let us be kept in our prison ever so lang! They may prow, breck and seek the hail country round, while we'll lie snug in here and do our braw work cheerily."

Not long after, Ewen said he could stay no longer; he must be off to Lochandhu by daylight. Donald muttered that if he chose to go out, and in that way, the risk of his society was more than it was worth; however, he helped Ewen liberally to the delicious, intoxicating breelish,\* to keep the cold out, and then, after a long and searching view of the horizon, looking out from the loop-hole in the bank, he helped to push him out, saw him plunge into the water, and swim safely up the Loch to where his clothes lay concealed on the bank. Ewen then started on with swift step for Lochandhu. There he met with welcome from his mother, and shortly afterwards told her, with angry, wounded feelings, of his late extraordinary interview with Jeanie.

Florh hummed an air, as if to herself, for a few moments. Ewen again burst forth,

“An’ what deevilry has come on the lass, mother? Tell me, could that sassenach keeper

\* Whisky in its strong ale stage.

have glamour'd her? Ralph would belie me, an' his English tongue run glib, did he care to seek her company!" and here a pang of jealousy shot through the Highlander's heart.

"No, my son; the keeper has a wife and bairns o' his ain in England countrie. But Jeanie, poor lass, she has been spinning and weaving the plaids o' fine wool to hap the feet of the keeper's masters; she has got gold for that—I hope she winna take it for aught else. Leave her alone, my son; it is na for a Mackenzie to fleece to a Cameron! Leave her; the snow time will be the trial time."

Ewen was silent; but the arrow was shot, and it remained in the wound: when suspicion was confirmed by proof, then it would be for the hand of revenge to draw it out.

It was about a week after this, one lonely evening, when Huistan, having returned from the hill, sat engrossed on the thyme-scented bank before the cottage-door, nursing a wounded lamb he had carried down in his arms, and when Ewen had gone back to Arduashien, that Florh,



putting on her plaid and a clean white mutch, set off walking leisurely to Glenbenrough. She wished to arrive there after dinner, when she would be sure to find the three young ladies not far from home. The merle and the mavis were in full evening song, and the balmy-scented air came warm and fragrant with the perfume of birch, fir, and bog-myrtle, extracted by the sun during the previous hot day. Florh saw from the Roua Pass, ere she descended, Norah and Ishbel, with their father, sauntering 'midst Norah's flowers in the garden, while Esmé, whom she wanted, sat with a book on one of the hall-door steps.

Esmé, seeing Florh in the distance, rose and went to meet her.

"Weel, my darling, and is the hoose empty noo? an' what day are ye all going to the Dual Ghu?" her foster mother exclaimed as she approached.

"Some day soon, I hope, dear Florh; it has all to be arranged yet. Come and sit down at the door."

As they sat there, Esmé could not but observe the restlessness of Florh; who answered absently, and looked about her uneasily, as if in dread of any interruption. There was evidently none of the heavenly repose of the evening about her, and her walk there had not been one for pleasure, but intended to be on business. Florh broke ground thus, just as Esmé was going to make the observation :

“Esmé, I hae come the night to speak on a sair subject. It’s on Ewen, your ain foster brother, whom ye must hae feeling for : my sleep has left me since last night till I could get this word with you.”

Here Florh sat down opposite Esmé; her lips became a bloodier red, and her smooth brow knit into a troubled frown as she spoke, angry determination kindling all over her fine strong face.

“It’s o’ Ewen I must tell you; and see, can you help me? He has been cursed ever since his servitude at Dreumah. The bread o’ the Englishmen there has brought him nought but

bitterness: an unlucky star it was that guided him there (or them either)" she muttered.

"But, Florh, that is an old story: Mr. Marchmoram told me all about it long ago. Nothing could have been more wrong than Ewen's conduct: he was not like any of the other gillies, who all behave subordnately and enjoy themselves in such a good place; but he was proud and foolish. Then it was a quarrel amongst themselves: Mr. Marchmoram only ordered them to make peace. Ewen was very wrong."

"Esmé," Florh exclaimed, her eye fiercely glaring, "ye winna turn against your foster brother for the sake o' a stranger!" (Esmé's lip slightly curved with a smile.) "It's o' Mr. Marchmoram I would speak: it is he that has brought misery on my son. But I speak no of the Dreumah gillieship: let Ewen be wrong there if it's your will to think it; but listen to this. Ye ken Jeanie Cameron, that has been Ewen's lassie since they were children at the school together? Never did lass lo'e lad more dearly than Jeanie

did my Ewen, and lang has he bided for his wedding-day. Weel, when he was at Dreumah, she went to see him different times: I sent her mysel' with claithe and wee things, to gie her an excuse to go. But, listen ye now; since Ewen left, Jeanie goes there still—she goes there still——”

“Well, Florh, what do you mean? Mr. Marchmoram told me that she goes there; she has spun plaids for the gentlemen. Ralph, the head keeper, recommended her spinning to them.”

“Aye, but listen yet, Esmé; you have not heard it out. Ewen was some time o' going to see Jeanie after he left, and the first time he did, what think ye? She treated him wi' scornfu' pride; she cast the Dreumah gillieship in his teeth; she praised Mr. Marchmoram (though he once struck my Ewen, Florh muttered between her teeth), and ever since she has withdrawn her company from him. At the kirk she does na' meet his eye, or mine; and trow she has need na to look up, for I hae

found the proof o' her conduct: I was sure to find it; trust Florh Mackenzie no to do it! By my own ways I found it; but I hae kept it frae Ewen as yet. Mr. Harold is the best man 'mongst them o' Dreumah: I know he is the best gentleman; and ye ken 'like master like man.' I could na' get proof but from them in the Lodge; I would na speak to the servants o' Mr. Auber and Mr. Marchmoram (they would be pretty sure to be gay lads, yon), but I made friends by slow degrees, and sure, with Mr. Harold's Gupini. Last night, sitting by my ain fireside, I made him toddy o' the strongest whisky ever smuggled in Glenbenrough, and then I got him out with the truth. Oh, Esmé, my son's undone! and where is happiness for him more? Jeanie Cameron has gien hersel' up to Mr. Marchmoram!"

"No, no, Florh," Esmé exclaimed vehemently, springing to her feet; "don't believe that: I will never believe it!"

"Aye, aye, that was what I feared, bairn; ye would na' believe it," Florh said with a

groan; "but will ye believe it if I gie you the proof? It behoves you to take proof."

"You could not; I know it is false: don't speak of it to me, Florh!"

"But I must speak. It may be nothing to you if Ewen is made a ne'er do weel for his life, an' leaves his mother an' his country for aye: ye may nae care for his happiness an' mine; but, there's another reason. Mr. Marchmoram is intimate, sae friendly here, and ye should know what he is." (Florh gave a withering sneer.) "Ye must na' refuse the proof: ye should know what he is! But this, tho' proved, will be no grand offence, I trow: there's few shooting-boxes in the country where the Englishmen may na take what sport they will."

"Florh, Gupini is from a country where lying and cunning are common in his class. Go to Jeanie herself, tax her with her shame, and a glance at her own face will tell you more truth than you will hear sworn to by the Italian. Don't give up your authority; merely tax her with your own accusation, and judge by her looks!"

“That’s not the way I work, Esmé. I will bide my time yet a wee: if the mischief’s done it canna be undone. Revenge would be sweet to me; but I would nae wish my son to take if, for he would na know where to stop. I will tell him nothing, unless I see my way clear; but Gupini, though a foreigner, is a simple lad; he likes my Ewen, he might tell him ——”

“Ah! Florh, beware! This is utterly false. Gupini may even have some dislike to Jeanie, and for this reason have said what he did.”

“No, no; I have been long trying to find out from him. I have not heard it all yet, but I will give him toddy every night till I do: a man speaks truth when he is fou.”

Ere Esmé could again reply, Ishbel came running up, and told her that tea was ready; and as Esmé went in she told Florh to remain, as she would walk part of the way to Loch-andhu with her and finish the conversation.

The sun was setting as they started, and the delightful freshness of the evening air cooled Esmé’s brow; which, from the recent continua-

tion of late hours, felt feverish. She took off her hat and courted the heather-scented breeze which played through her hair and on her brow.

This communication of Florh's, from its suddenness and grave import, had given Esmé a shock; but it was merely a repellant one on hearing the name of Marchmoram so irreverently approached: the desecration of Florh's account of her familiar converse with the Italian valet, touching him to whom already a lofty conception was attaching a sort of sanctity. How dared he fix on that high name for his falsehood! the word should have burnt his lips! Florh spoke of revenge, and Esmé felt that some pulse, vibrating to the promptings of that passion, beat in her heart now. She must have this Italian banished: could not Norah's influence prevail upon Harold to dismiss him from his service?

Esmé did not believe in any guilt connected with Jeanie at all; but when, as they walked, Florh assured her that Ewen, one night lately on his way to Arduashien, had passed Dreumah Lodge, and himself got a glimpse of Jeanie



stealing behind the house, she the more strongly urged Florh to seek personal explanation from the girl.

They had passed the Roua Pass a considerable distance before Esmé observed that, by that sympathy which so curiously influences action, she had wandered from the track to Lochandhu, and was following one which led direct to Jeanie Cameron's cottage. Florh in her excitement and abstraction had also been unconscious of the diversion, but they both became aware of it at the same moment. Esmé now redoubled her arguments to induce Florh to seek an interview with Jeanie.

"No, no, Esmé, ma guil, 'tis no the time; I will bide a wee: the proofs are to be gi'en to me all sure, and then I will turn on her: then I will go, once and for all."

"Take care, Florh! Take care that you don't wreck your own son's happiness. I am sure the girl is wronged."

"Aye, wi' her own consent!" exclaimed Florh, with a hasty bitter laugh. "I believe

in her guilt as sure as I do in the blackness o' yon rocks."

"You asked my advice," continued Esmé firmly; "it is that you should be honest and act straightforwardly: don't take underhand ways, in which you may meet one any day to outwit yourself. Gupini may have a stronger head than you suppose. Surely you would rather have proof of the girl's innocence than of her guilt! Go to her, and I believe you will be able, with your own quickness, to judge better from seeing herself. If it is only a passing quarrel with Ewen, you can then make it up and bring him back to her; but if you find she has entered into any flirtation with one of the other Dreumah gillies, or has chosen another lad amongst them (for I don't believe her guilty in any way), then break it to Ewen gently. For God's sake, Florh, don't stir up wicked thoughts of revenge: Ewen's disposition at any time is not so good as Huistan's, and you would never forgive yourself if you led him into harm."

Esmé ceased. She would not have mentioned

Mr. Marchmoram's name in any conjunction whatsoever with the story; and Florh knew her too well to attempt further allusion to him at present, save by the insinuation of her manner.

"Weel, weel, Esmé, I will think: I hae it to think o'. I have lived longer than you, and have seen Jeanie's betters discovered to have been guilty, wi' less witness than has been gien me o' her. But I must turn home, and think how will I win Gupini to silence. My Ewen keeps his company, an' should he hear while his anger is hot, I would na save the highest in the land from his vengeance;"—here Florh glanced at Esmé, who looked haughtily defiant;—"but, indeed, if I keep it from Ewen now, I may do it ever: he has loe'd Jeanie all his life, an' if he lose her, his anger will never cool. His love and his anger, and his thought for vengeance, would be the same five years hence!" and Florh stubbornly turned in the path, with her face towards Lochandu.

"Well, go home; and next time you come

to Glenbenrough I hope it will be to tell me you have acted rightly, Florh. I am thirsty, I must take a drink," Esmé said, and she advanced to a little group of birch trees in front, where she knew of a spring, bubbling beneath their shadow. It was a wild, tangled little spot, with sunken rocks and trunks of trees covered with honeysuckle, ivy, and tall ferns. Florh stood beside her as she stooped to drink; at the same moment a slight noise in the under-wood made Esmé start round.

"'Tis but a madobh-roua, or a gaur,"\* said Florh; but Esmé's eye had caught sight of something more bulky: she sprang forward, as a swarthy face, with a pair of gleaming black eyes, looked up from the heather, and a voice exclaimed in broken English,

"Ah, signorina, E trovato! the flask perduto—my master's flask, me has found: me seek it very long—many days."

It was Gupini, Harold's valet; who, as he rose from the ground, held up a silver-topped

\* Fox, or a hare.

drinking flask, which Esmé recognised as having seen in Harold's possession. Esmé shuddered as she drew herself to her full height, and glanced around; on every side the solitude was unbroken: there was no living being within sight, save themselves. She only allowed herself to give a distant nod to the valet, ere she turned away towards Glenbenrough, followed by Florh.

They had scarcely disappeared, when Gupini raised the flask to his lips and quaffed a draught, calling out,

"Bella signorina! buona suocera mia, alla sua salute! Venite qua, mia Carrisima!" (Beautiful young lady! good mother-in-law, I drink to your health! Come here, my dearest.)

A rosy-cheeked face peeped out from behind an ivied rock, and the faithless Jeanie Cameron stood revealed. The Highland girl, with her chubby cheeks, replying in harsh, guttural Gaelic to euphonious Italian, and with the wondering look of ignorance holding a fragile pair of Genoese bracelets in her rough, sun-burnt hand, was a striking picture.

Gupini had entered Harold's service as courier when he had first gone abroad, and had proved a most valuable acquisition. He was a clever Italian, with instinctive quickness, untiring energy, and perfect temper; and he had so identified himself with his master's pleasant reminiscences of travel and adventure, that Harold habitually associated the Italian with his most vivid enjoyments. Gupini had had his faculties sharpened and his innate qualities improved by worldly experience: he evidently knew life thoroughly, and was an acute observer of character. A romantic feeling, the gift of his clime, had not been extinguished in him; and it had served him on more occasions than one. Gupini was too shrewd a calculator not to appreciate Harold's easy English service as a desirable occupation for a time; and while he faithfully attended on his master, he enjoyed himself otherwise most thoroughly.

The first few weeks of Dreumah made Gupini rather *triste*: it was too solitary, and to live without an intrigue seemed to Gupini great

waste of talent; so when Jeanie Cameron fell in his way, he successfully attempted to practise on her simple nature all the baleful arts he was master of. Ewen was his *bête noir*; for Gupini knew that a Highland dirk was quite as ready as an Italian stiletto, and he did not desire the personal use or application of either weapon. While his interviews with Jeanie were becoming almost too piquant from the daily increasing dread of discovery, the way to gain her love was suddenly made easy to him by Florh; and a new source of excitement was thus opened to the crafty little Italian. He thoroughly enjoyed the cunning game he had now to play, and succeeded in deceiving and baffling Florh, though she was too equally matched with himself; so that unless put upon such a completely wrong scent as to turn all her energies in a contrary distant direction, she might any day discover his plot. He was too good a servant to bring down maledictions on his master; therefore he quietly directed suspicion on Marchmoram, and so completely did he

succeed, that the more Florh saw Gupini in Jeanie's company the better she would be pleased, thinking he was furthering her aim by winning Jeanie's confidence.

Florh was sadly disconcerted, and felt that time alone would unravel to her a clue to the truth. She well knew her son's future happiness and well-doing depended on the result. A strict code of morality is not generally observed amongst the lower classes in the Highlands; there are such numerous instances of this that there is no room for doubt upon the subject. The Scotch temperament is undemonstrative, outwardly not ardent, but under cautious self-control, and a Calvinistic self-denial often influences even their loves; yet but too many instances of *faux pas* occur amongst the unmarried of the lower classes.

There is a primitive leniency shown also; the fallen one being merely spoken of as having had a "misfortune" (the word raises a smile on the lip of those who know the exact sympathetic drawl with which it is uttered,) and



her disgrace seldom proves any obstacle to the formation of a future respectable marriage. But there is a line of difference drawn, by far greater forbearance being extended to those who offend only with their own class: the Scotch lads may forgive the sinful rivalry of each other, where a stranger's amour would be followed by hottest indignation.

Florh, however, knew that Ewen's was a peculiar case: his love for Jeanie had grown with his years, and so long been the fixed hope for future happiness, that any sudden shock like this would stir up all the strongest passions of his nature; and were she to confess and repent, and even atone for her faithlessness by years of contrition, it would be doubtful if his wounded pride could ever recover itself sufficiently to induce him to restore her to his first trust. The only chance of the latter lay in his never knowing for whom she had betrayed him: had it been one of his equals among his countrymen, there would have been more likelihood of his re-

lenting; but were he to know it was the high-born Englishman who had supplanted him, the fury of the wolf, thirsting for the blood of the harrier of his young, could not exceed that with which Ewen would pursue the foreign interloper. Hate and vengeance alone would then find room in his bosom; his despair, or grief for Jeanie, would turn to bitter hate: never, never could she return to him then. And as for Marchmoram, if he valued his life let him not return to Dreumah!

Florh knew that all these feelings would be roused in Ewen's mind, and she scarcely knew yet what course to take. Had Jeanie been betrayed by one of her own class, Florh would, out of love for her son, have induced him in time to forgive the erring one; and they might yet marry: she would conquer her pride, and his, in the knowledge of doing what was best for his happiness; but as it was, she felt she must have time to strengthen her mind ere she could teach herself to forgive Jeanie's guilt, and to arrange a reconciliation,

by never allowing Ewen to know who was the betrayer. The Englishman would leave the country by-and-bye, and in the meantime she must bind Gupini down to secrecy. She would in the winter make up her mind how to act.

## CHAPTER II.

## PLOTS AND PERILS.

'Tis true ye are furnished fair, Birdie, 'tis true ye are  
furnished fair,

Wi' a braw pair o' bonny wings,  
Wad waft ye were yon lav'roch sings  
High up in air.

But then the wire's sae strong, Birdie, but then the  
wire's sae strong,

An' I myself sae seemin' free,  
Nae wings hae I to waften me  
Where fain I' gang.

And say ye got your will, Birdie, your proudfu' wilfu'  
way,

When lav'rochs hover, falcon's fly,  
And snares and pitfalls aften lie  
Where wishes stray.

WHEN Marchmoram left Glenbenrough for  
Dreumah, Esmé, who was seated at the hall  
door when he left the house, asked him, as he

bade her adieu, when he would be back: he did not seem to hear her, however, and made no reply, but, whistling to his dogs, turned away.

By dinner time, all the Miss Mac Neils, each in her own way, had realised how much Marchmoram was missed; but Esmé could not have expressed what she felt: his absence left a blank in her mind. The new element of the stimulus of his presence was wanting, and a craving void alone remained. Where was the glance of his eagle eye, to be met by bright laughing defiance? Where the voice ever ready to applaud, reprove, control? At night, when she went to look at the stars ere going to bed, her gaze fell on the Roua Pass; whence it rose no higher. She fancied him climbing it that forenoon, and thought also of the moonlight walk of the night before.

For the first few days after his arrival at Dreumah, Marchmoram's society had been no great acquisition to his friends there: he was absent, and evidently not i' the vein. He said he

had letters to write, and consequently sat much within doors; and the deer rejoiced in his altered mood.

Harold now had choice of the beats; for Auber also laid aside his gun for a week, as the sprain in his knee still troubled him; and he too sat by the fire and meditated, conversed, or read. He and Marchmoram were close friends; they had known each other almost since infancy; had travelled through Europe together, aided and advised each other a hundred times; and each thought he thoroughly understood the other. Auber knew that Marchmoram's dominant passion was ambition, and that it was subdued only by his will: that he had been cherishing this passion, but restraining it until the time for its actual exercise should come. Indeed, Auber knew the secret workings of his friend's mind so well, that he could have whispered into Marchmoram's astonished ear one of the very highest of his aims and his means of attaining it; adding his friend's motto, "He who is in earnest wins."

But Auber, with all his quick sightedness, and though he knew his friend so well, was now deceived: there was a fierce struggle going on in Marchmoram's mind, but the new combatant that had sprung up, was yet invisible to him. Auber, in his analysis of Marchmoram, applied to his character the inexorable axiom, "On ne revient guère de l'ambition à l'amour;" but then he forgot that the germs of ambition were only striking root, and that love might yet prevail by its quicker growth. Though not unaware of the strange weaknesses of the masculine nature, Auber had not the remotest idea that at this very moment the battle of inclination with expediency was raging in the breast of his friend.

Marchmoram was hesitating whether he should allow himself to fall in love with Esmé Mac Neil or not. Aye, in love! Auber, of course, knew that Marchmoram admired Esmé: this had always been evident to him; and also that Marchmoram took an interest, as men like them naturally would, in a character such as her's.

Auber also knew the nobility in Marchmoram's nature, which would enshrine the object of that interest, and shield it from harm: he knew that Marchmoram would hold with a firm grasp the reins of his passion.

Auber had no plan at present; he was going on an expedition into his own peculiar regions of pleasure. The route in some respects was a new one, and as he must loiter on the way, and change his course as inclination might prompt, he would rather not have had a companion; especially as reserve sometimes adds zest to enjoyment: but to have in his friend a mentor stalking by him would be insufferable. What he had to do must be done secretly. Marchmoram should see only a flirtation with Esmé, which would veil any deeper designs; and he not being in Auber's confidence, this wily man of the world could take his pleasure and retain his friend while outwitting him. But Auber, being wholly deceived as to Marchmoram's state of feeling, through that first grand mistake fell into another.



Marchmoram's wit was whetted keen — his perception was penetrating: he knew his friend, and he knew that there was too much excitement in this new game to restrain Auber's dangerous powers. He was sure that Auber would follow Esmé and would try to make her his prey, and that he would conceal it from him. But Marchmoram knew Esmé also; he had probed her character, and the result of his scrutiny was a conviction that she was safe. He would watch over her: it would be a study to observe the graceful movements and varying attitudes of this little wild deer, unconsciously approaching with delicate step; then springing out of reach of danger into the ambush, again and again to return under the influence of fascination.

The only danger was, he thought, that his own admiration might become too engrossing; might not he, the on-looker, find himself at last stepping down from his height, and taking the young creature to his bosom? Was there

no danger of this? Yet, for him Esmé would not be a legitimate conquest: she was too great a contrast to that of the Queen of the Forest, whom he had intended to pursue. And would this exchange of beauty for strength satisfy in the end? No! he had never been vacillating in purpose, and he would not now alter his first choice, while his reason stood firm by him.

The conversations between Marchmoram and Auber in the Lodge of Dreumah became an intellectual game of chess: each talked exactly as suited the play; but Auber was unaware of Marchmoram being an interested player.

Nearly a week had elapsed after Marchmoram's return to Dreumah, when, after an interchange of notes with Glenbenrough, he proposed a plan which seemed already to have been decided on by himself.

Glenbenrough was going with his daughters in a few days to the Dual Ghu, a distant boundary of his property. Some of the Strathshielie party, who were to have accompanied him, were prevented, and he therefore had great pleasure in

inviting the three sportsmen from Dreumah. The only available accommodation at the Dual Ghu was to be found in the shealing of the pastoral tenant there, and would be required for the ladies ; but a small tent would be pitched for Glenbenrough and young Arduashien, and the Dreumah party must find their own accommodation.

“This,” Marchmoram said, now speaking to Auber and Harold, “might easily be done, as we have our shooting-tent at hand, and it can be sent up to the Dual Ghu.”

They agreed, and on Marchmoram saying he would walk to Glenbenrough next day to settle the preliminary arrangements, they said they would go too : accordingly they again arrived together at Glenbenrough.

During the merry lunch which ensued, it was settled that the Dreumah party should come on the afternoon of the 23rd, their luggage having been previously sent on ; and that on the dawn of the 25th, both parties combined should start on horseback for the Dual Ghu.

After lunch, Marchmoram went with Glenbenrough to view some antique weapon in his study, while the young ladies proceeded with the other gentlemen to the garden, to visit a famous old apple-tree of the almost extinct Scotch species of "Jenny Sinclair."

While Ishbel climbed into the branches and threw down the fruit, which Norah and Harold gathered, Auber led Esmé to her favourite seat, a rock overhanging the river and shaded by wild cherry and old garden trees. Here they talked with the familiarity of intimate acquaintance.

"Did you ever find that music enhances the pleasure of reading, Mr. Auber?"

"In what way, Esmé?"

"Oh, it intensifies the enjoyment. The rushing of the river here is like music to me; and in reading history it stirs my imagination, so that I seem to see the events as I read. The singing of birds suits Shelley's poetry; and other musical sounds, different subjects. You should try it: reading to music is exquisite pleasure."

Auber smiled as he replied, "I certainly never set thought to music, as you do, Esmé; but I never tire of enjoying the union in operas. How you would delight in the opera!" And he thought of the piquant enjoyment her young enthusiasm would give him, seated for the first time at the opera, and by his side.

Esmé asked him to tell her some of the stories of operas, and with skilful variation of tones and expression, Auber led Esmé in imagination through the scenes of "La Sonnambula," "Norma," "I Puritani." As he dwelt artfully, yet delicately, on the scenes of passion, a blush would rise on Esmé's cheek; when, his voice changing its tone, he would lead to a different scene. And so he talked, thrilling her with delight like a child listening to a fairy tale. At last Glenbenrough and Marchmoram appeared in the distance. As they arose and moved to join them, Auber said to Esmé,

"These little talks are very pleasant, Esmé; I hope we may have them oftener. I shall ride over here on the afternoon of the 23rd, and

leave Dreumah earlier than the others; could you not go to Lochandhu that day for lilies? If you are there soon after three o'clock, I might escort you back to Glenbenrough."

Esmé hesitated a moment; Auber looked at her with a smile of surprise, and repeated his question. Not allowing herself time to analyse conflicting feelings, she answered, as they were almost within hearing of the others,

"Yes—perhaps."

On the morning of the 23rd of September Normal Mac Alastair left Arduashien for Glenbenrough; but ere he reached the latter place an adventure had befallen him. He rode the first fifteen miles, carrying his gun slung to the crupper of his saddle; then, dismounting at a lonely little wayside inn, which stood on the hill track parallel to that terminating at Dreumah, he pursued his way on foot; that exercise suiting his inclination best.

In riding up to the inn, Normal had noticed a large travelling carriage, heavily laden with imperials and drawn by four wearied horses,

toiling slowly up the steep ascent before him ; probably conveying some wealthy English visitors to their fashionable friends' shooting quarters. The host of the inn, who was filling his snuff-mull lazily at the door, replied in Gaelic to Normal's inquiry, that he knew nothing of their course or destination.

"Muckle fine sassenach servants!" he said. "They asked had we corn and stabling; and girmed and snickered when I showed them the byre, where our ain beasts lie. The wife though, she up and told them she wad na be fashed to turn out the kye for them. It's she that'll no be put upon by ignorant, prood, forrein folk!"

"Those horses will never pull on to Braemorin," Normal observed. In the meantime the carriage went on, toiling up a steep rugged track between high barrier hills, and swaying heavily with the weight of luggage and the inequality of the road. The horses stopped for breath, when about a mile past the inn, and where the hills seemed to crush together

in advance and sternly forbid all further progress.

The fortress required but to be stormed, however, for within a hundred yards there was a rent in the foremost rock; through this natural archway of high and frowning strength the carriage noisily passed, and then the horses' feet pressed onwards down a grassy winding ravine—a luxurious contrast. The way lay before, winding amid high banks of natural waving grass and steep wooded hill sides, green with feathery birch and palmy fern; beneath rocky precipices bright with purple heather, slanting down into a shadowy and sunlit gorge, soft and bright as a painter's dream.

It was a scene not to be passed unheeded. The carriage again stopped, and ere officious maid and valet could descend to assist, the door opened and a tall woman alighted. She waved her hand to the driver to proceed, and smiled and nodded to an elderly man, who looked out after her as she quickly walked on. The lady was very tall, of a slight and straight figure,



with pale, dark features, shadowed by a black broad brimmed riding hat. She wore a plain, grey travelling dress, and her step had the firm elasticity and conscious ease of a high-bred woman, as she trod the smooth grassy track. It was a fine face, and the eyes looked with a clear and decided gaze on all the scenery around; but neither on the face nor on the eyes was there any kindling glow of pleasure. It was a cold, impassible face; too smooth and polished to be called worn, but without a trace of sensibility or freshness.

As the lady walked on she appeared absent—spoke audibly to herself; she took out a little note-book, and seemed absorbed over some written leaves; then she wrote in it with a pencil: but certainly that pencil traced no sketch or observation of the scene before her. At last the bracing, perfumed air seemed to recal her to the present; and she ascended a wild rock, and looked around, apparently in search of the carriage. It was nowhere visible; so she clambered upwards to a precipitous path,

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which ran along the gorge at a great height from the track beneath: it was slippery, from its rich verdure being saturated by the trickling burns which flooded it every here and there.

The view before her extended far beyond, into wilder glens and along winding rivers—an unbroken solitude; and it caused her to start with surprise when she was suddenly disturbed by the presence of two persons seated in the heather, almost in the path before her. There sat a young man and a Highland shepherd maid, their arms entwined around each other, and partly screened from her haughty view by wild honeysuckle and tangling brier. Those two hearts were beating too closely together,—the words of love were too softly, rapidly whispered,—for the pair to perceive the stately contempt of that lady; who, drawing herself to her full height, seemed as if prepared to overshadow them by her dignified presence.

She advanced with averted look; yet, as if impelled by some fascination, cast a momentary glance at the lovers. Had an adder sprung

up at her feet ; had the rock beneath her opened a fiery gulph ; had her heart been paralysed for an instant ; the agony of her expression—her dumb, ghastly attempt to escape the sight before her—could not have been more horrifying. That cold, impassible face was white and spectral ; the eyes fiercely glared like a tiger's at bay ; the thin lips were drawn convulsively ; the low, Greek brow was shrivelled up beneath the hair, and her trembling fingers grasped the rock for support.

Clinging to a rowan-tree that overhung the edge of the path, she sunk down upon her knees, and her head struck upon the ground : her brain was reeling. Presently she rose, and summoning strength, she retraced her steps some paces ; but there was no safety in that, for the pair might move away and come upon her again. She must climb and get higher up—ascend the hills to avoid them. Quickly, and with excitement almost maddening, she climbed the almost precipitous rocks above ; her delicate foot resting on the sharp-edged ledge, and

her jewelled hands grasping the thorny whin, she dragged herself up, her dress hanging about her in torn strips, and blood starting at the knee.

But this day's struggle was not over yet. On the heights above, a wide expanse of moor and wood, bounded by high rocky hills, lay spread around; and at the distance of about half-a-mile, the termination of the long deep gorge below seemed gained. A beaten road then appeared, emerging from a thicket of pine and fir; and there the travelling carriage was drawn up stationary, evidently awaiting her approach.

The lady took off her hat, and sinking down on a moss-covered stone, sat there immovable, her face buried between her hands; long, deep drawn inspirations marking the reaction of excitement and fatigue. When she looked up, her eyes were bloodshot and a tear quivered in each: she wiped them proudly, and a hard, determined look succeeded. The cold, polished calm came gradually back, as she sat there in the mountain breeze; and an expression of dis-

dainful power showed whence it came. "I am strong," was written in every lineament of that haughty, but impassive, face. The lady arose at last and walked on, apparently restored to her previous dignified calmness.

The gorge was now at a great depth beneath ; and those two figures on the path were left a long way behind, and many feet below. The lady walked on along the edge of the path and close to a thick fir wood, which grew almost to the brink of the precipice. She would have some scrambling ere she could again descend to the road beyond, where the carriage waited, and before she reached it : altogether she was not likely to forget this Highland walk.

As she advanced, the sound of an axe striking amongst the trees attracted her ; and, thinking it might be a wood-cutter who would direct her to an easier path, the lady turned into the wood towards it. A loud discordant voice, singing a Gaelic psalm, to the time of the strokes, led her on, and in a few moments she had confronted the singer. It was Angus of

the Hammer; he was half naked, as usual, having only a tattered plaid tied by a rope round his waist, and with his ponderous hammer he was beating and bruising the trees. Insanity burnt in his light glazed eye; and his long matted hair hung like a yellow mane on his shoulders.

The lady stopped not to scrutinise the man: she took for granted that he was only one of the savage peasantry of the country; so, in tone as imperious as if addressing an English manservant, she asked, "Can you direct me to the road beneath?"

Angus N'Ort appeared not either to see or to hear her: he went on striking blindly against the trees and muttering in Gaelic and English; "Hew them an' hack them: the Philistines are against thee! Cleave them, and brain them! Scatter the ungodly to the winds!"

The lady understood not a word of his idiom, so she repeated her query a little louder, and advanced a step nearer; an expression of disgust appearing on her face as she did so.

Angus ceased for a moment, and stared with startled wonder on this apparition: a blank look came over his otherwise not unvacant visage, and, as if understanding that it was some kind of request she addressed to him, he fumbled with his hand into a woollen bag he wore tied round his naked brawny neck, and drew out a tin snuff-box which he proffered, saying gruffly, "Sneezhin?"

The lady, who did not know that to offer a pinch of snuff is the most ordinary mode of salutation in the Highlands, frowned, and with a scornful gesture repulsed the proffered civility. "Do you understand me?" she said; "I desire to know which path to take, so as to get easiest down. Show me, and I will pay you."

That look and bearing struck dangerously on the madman's fancy: perhaps the recent excitement had given the lady's eye an unnatural light of imperiousness,—and then her dress was unusual. He bent forward as if to listen, as he whispered hoarsely,

"Were ye sent here?" Are ye an angel o'

mammon's; if so, I'm against ye!" and he put out his finger to touch her.

"Don't touch me!" she exclaimed, drawing back with loathing: "He must be mad," she muttered, as she turned away to regain the path.

But it was too late. Angus N'Ort sprang after her: his mad fury was excited, and tossing his head like a bull waxing wroth, and foaming at the mouth, he strode by her, muttering inarticulate words; his rage, and her danger, increasing every moment.

"Touch ye not! Touch ye not! Then ye're one o' the Deamhan's dark ones! I must hae conflict wi' ye—here, out on the lone hill top! 'Consume them in wrath,' it is said! I'll consume thee: I'll send thee down to the place o' dragons!"

He seized her arm and tried to drag her along. They were on the very edge of the slippery precipice. With sudden ireful energy she unloosed his grasp and thrust him back; and, trembling as much from insulted pride



as fear, she stamped her foot and bade him begone.

The flame of madness was kindled : he sprang on that high-born woman with a yell, shouting, "Down, down to the pit o' perdition! Pride takes its fa'. Down to death and torment!" Then, bending her slight figure in his grasp like a reed, he prepared to hurl her over the precipice.

The appalling danger of death at the hands of a Highland madman was, however, averted by an unforeseen interposition. At that critical moment a strong and well-directed blow, struck by a vigorous arm, felled the madman like a bull; and as Angus N'Ort rolled over, the lady sprang up unhurt from the ground.

Young Normal Mac Alastair it was who thus timely interposed. Setting his foot on the prostrate assailant, with the leathern belt of his gun he endeavoured to tie the madman's hands.

A struggle ensued, which, in its ferocity and strength, fascinated the eye of the lady; who leant, pale as a statue, against a tree. Brute rage and frantic force strove against masculine

courage and high tempered strength. The athletic figure of young Normal striving with the yelling naked madman, who, conquered, lay beneath his feet, might have served for a model to the sculptor.

Angus gnashed his teeth in helpless rage, and snapped at Normal's knee as it pressed on his brawny chest, while his hands were being bound together; and when Normal finally threw a handkerchief over the madman's eyes as he rose, the yells were fearful, and his execrations terrible in their import.

"Oh, the darkness devoureth! the darkness devoureth!" he shrieked. "Let me no lie in the blackness o' darkness for ever! They'll be on me now, and howk out my soul wi' talons o' iron. Let me go! Let me go! Their jaws will gape, and they'll roar wi' tongues o' fire an' flame!"

"Hush, Angus, or the devil will hear you and come," Normal said. "Lie there, and I will soon send good people here.

"We must make haste and be gone," he

added quickly, as he picked up his gun and plaid and approached the lady; "Where may I escort you?"

The lady pointed to the carriage beneath, and Normal almost bore her along; as, breaking whin and heather before him, he brought her safely down the long rocky descent to the gorge. She scarcely spoke until they reached the bottom; when he set her down on the grass, and taking out a quaich filled it at a spring and brought it to her. He replied with natural grace and ease, as she thanked him, in a few and earnest words, for saving her life.

"May I not know the name of him whom I should never forget?" she asked.

"Oh, I am one of a large clan," Normal replied, with a laugh; "with a name not very pronounceable! I trust you will never think of this fright again. I require your pardon as much as your thanks; for had I walked more quickly, it might have been altogether prevented."

As they drew nearer to the carriage, she held out her hand and bade him good-bye. "My

father," she said, "had best not know of this adventure: it would needlessly alarm and pain him; but my gratitude to you is not the less deep and lasting. I never will forget you: we may yet meet in England."

He bowed low and gracefully, with eagle-plumed bonnet in hand, as she advanced and looked back; and she never forgot that handsome young Celt, with his cool courage and native strength, and an expression, derived partly from mental gifts, in his clear boldly speaking face. She had feared to mention her name to him; for she was still too near to that accursed spot on the path, that had sent her climbing up to meet this later danger: and thus, despite her gratitude, and an admiring interest in him, the woman whose life he had saved, hoped never to see Normal Mac Alastair again.

About the hour when Normal was struggling with Angus N'Ort, Esmé was pacing up and down a walk in the garden at Glenbenrough, hesitating as to her proposed ride to Lochandhu.

It was not to gather water-lilies, but to meet Mr. Auber, that she was to go. In her innocence and ignorance of the strict rules of young-lady decorum, Esmé would have ridden solitary through the darkest hours of night with Auber, and have felt no dread of harm ; but then she would have gone openly with a direct purpose. She now felt an unaccountable objection. She could on no account have mentioned to Norah this little scheme of a ride ; she wished to go ; but an inward whisper counselled prudence. Yet what could there be wrong in it ?—Nothing. Then she would start at once. She walked boldly to the garden door ; but faltered, and turned back. She felt it was very childish : how easily he had asked her ; and what a fuss to make about such a little arrangement ! (the word assignation never entered her head).

She left the garden and called to her pony, which was grazing on the river bank ; but Suila behaved with strange caprice, and capered out of reach each time Esmé approached. At last an apple tempted Suila, whom she caught

by her mane, and led to the hall door, where saddle and bridle lay ready. The bridle was on and Esmé had turned to lift the saddle, when, with a bound, the ungrateful Suila darted off, galloping away; and with head thrown back and snorting passionately, disappeared, going at full speed, round the base of the Roua Pass.

The saddle dropped from Esmé's hand. Never, in her remembrance, had the pony behaved like this before; and a slight feeling of superstition was aroused by its conduct.

"Suila, you were right!" Esmé exclaimed; and she slowly walked away, taking the path up the Roua Pass. She sat down on the height, and, gazing on the view beneath, meditated.

Esmé might have sat half-an-hour thus, and the autumnal shade of the afternoon was beginning to fall on the scene below, when a shrill whistle startled her. Turning her head, she saw Mr. Marchmoram wading through the heather with his dogs; he soon came up to her, and then sat down on the rock, his

dogs lying at their feet. He told Esmé that he and Harold had walked from Dreumah, but the latter had parted company and was finding his way to the house by the bridge. Auber intended to ride, but had not left Dreumah by the time they did.

"And what were you thinking about, sitting here, Esmé? Were your thoughts sublime as the scenery?"

"In one way they were; but in another way they were lowly, for they were earthly, Mr. Marchmoram. They were of the high things of the earth."

"Are you ambitious, Esmé?"

"Well, in respect of the earth, I think sometimes I am. I was just thinking, sitting here, that I would like to be a Countess. If I were to marry a rich English Earl I think I could make him happier, and be much happier myself, than if I had been born a Countess."

"Tell me how: I must hear this."

"In my experience of the life I have hitherto led, I have tasted all its healthy pleasures,

and the enjoyments of rustic competence; but I feel as if I could enter into all the luxuries and pleasures of higher rank quite as naturally."

"But how would your pride, Esmé, like the idea of an Earl thinking he honoured you in marriage?"

"But that is exactly what he would not feel; and what I would not," she replied quickly. "I have no faith in the romantic union of high and lowly, which means that of the educated with one uneducated: *mésalliances* never succeed. But were I to marry the Earl, I would feel on as perfect equality with him as his sister might; for I am a lady by birth, and have been educated, have lived a natural and healthy life, and, I hope, am not vulgar."

"How, then, draw the distinction?" March-moram said; "why should you be happier than a born Countess, who may be vigorous and healthy, and have led a natural life?"

"Simply from comparison," Esmé replied, looking abstractedly as she spoke: "a Countess born (or one who may have been a Duke's



daughter ere her marriage to the Earl) has been accustomed from her birth to all the grandeur and luxury around her. A new set of costly jewels would excite no more pleasurable sense of novelty in her than the change of one colour of linsey woolsey for another would now excite in me: she can have no more zest for the brilliant scenes of ball-rooms than I have in the routine of our evening occupations! In all perfect refinement of manner there is some insipidity. The born Countess has never dreamt of stooping from her high rank, has not been free to converse with rugged nature, nor has ever wandered from chamber to chamber of life, seeing for herself. However rarified the luxurious atmosphere of aristocratic life may appear, yet it must be inwardly stifling."

"And could you, think you, Esmé, step into this higher sphere and act your part well?" Marchmoram pursued, watching her face with interest.

"I don't think that would be very difficult," she replied. "Many and many a young com-

moner, like me, raised to high rank, might act this part very well; move through a quadrille with the same abstracted air of high breeding, and gaze with as haughty indifference on the crowd beneath. I could show you exactly what I mean," she added, with a smile: "but were I, Esmé Mac Neil, exactly as I now am, to become suddenly a Countess, my aim would be to combine both. I would be Countess Esmé with the heart of Esmé Mac Neil: I could be lady-like without being cold: I would love my husband as a man, not as an Earl. As a Countess, intellectually qualified for those easy social externals, I would feel there could be no derogation in mixing freely in society, and choosing out minds of originality, or power, or goodness, to hold pleasant communion with, wherever we saw them. If from courtly scenes we came to the Highlands, he could enjoy his shooting without fear of the solitude wearying me. I would climb the rocks in my tartan skirt, to meet him returning from his vigorous sport on the hills; and, when we returned to

England again, I could be there all he wished, showing pride to the proud, but being natural with all."

"Well, then," Marchmoram said, "would your aim be simply happiness for yourself and your titled husband, Esmé? Would you not desire to ascend in the scale of rank, still carrying healthy influence with you? would you not desire from the Countess to become Duchess?"

"No," Esmé replied gravely; "that might be too great responsibility: but having a strong natural ambition of rank, I have always felt that in satisfied consciousness of it, and under shadow of its power, I could enjoy life with all the vigorous training of my early youth."

"I understand you: a strange idea to enter the heart of a little Highland girl," said Marchmoram, after a pause, during which he had been deliberating whether to say more.

"Shall I sing you my favourite song now, Mr. Marchmoram?" asked Esmé, turning to him with an arch smile.

"What is it?"

"An antidote to that dangerous day-dream."  
(What would Norah have said could she have  
overheard it!) And then in a low, sweet voice  
she sang:

"Oh, gin I were a Baron's heir,  
And could I braid wi' gams ye're hair,  
And mak' ye braw as ye are fair,  
Lassie, would ye lo'e me?"

"And could I tak' ye to the toun,  
And show ye braw sights many an ane,  
And busk ye fine in silken gown,  
Lassie, would ye lo'e me?"

"Or should you be content to prove  
In lowly life unfading love,  
A heart that nought on earth could move,  
Lassie, would ye lo'e me?"

"And ere the lavrock lilt the sky,  
Say, wad ye to the forest hie,  
And wark wi' me sae merrily,  
Lassie, for I lo'ed ye?"

"An' when the braw moon glistens o'er  
Our wee bit bield an' heathery muir,  
Will ye nae greet, for ye're sae puir,  
Lassie, though I lo'ed ye?"

"For I hae nought to offer ye;  
Nae gowd frae mine, nae pearl frae sea,  
Nor am I come o' high degree,  
Lassie, but I lo'e ye."

"Now, Mr. Marchmoram, 'the desire to become a Countess ought not to cross me again for ages!" she said as she ceased.

"Why, this is but the plaint of a lover to an ambitious mistress, Esmé!" Marchmoram exclaimed. "Depend on it, that little song never will drown the whisper of the tide: as he was singing, she was feeling that *ennui* might reach the lowly cot, and that if she married the Baron's heir she might enjoy the moonlight glistening on the moor, and also glancing on gold and jewels when tired of the moor, exactly as you pictured it yourself just now!"

Esmé did not reply, and he continued:—

"I know, Esmé, that you revolt against the lowly cot, and that acceptance of it with you would be but temporary. Your song only came as a supplement to the ambition of the Countess; and the latter being first is first: 'tis your natural

temperament, which is always stronger than education. You can't resist—you can't resist."

"I feel that; but I hate it: it keeps me from heaven," she replied fervently. Then, turning round, she fixed her blue eyes, beaming with excitement, on his face. He met her gaze with a steadfast look, and as they continued speaking, his dark eyes blazed with unwonted fire. Had Esmé been less absorbed she might not have mingled look with look so fearlessly; but the time for knowledge was not yet quite come.

"Oh, Mr. Marchmoram!" she exclaimed, "this fancy of the Countess is but one phase of the restlessness ever stirring; but oftenest beneath the snow-bound horizon of Highland winters. In summer and autumn I can take my flight, materially, and quench my mental thirst of ambition in physical fatigue: when the fit comes on, I dispel it by a gallop over the hills.

"There is no strength without concentration, Esmé; if you foster your ambition thus till

the right time comes, it will carry all before it."

"But I wish to get free of it."

"Why?"

"Because I am not a man," she replied distinctly and firmly; and rising, she stood erect, with heightened colour, beside Marchmoram; who compressed his lip, and the fire of whose eyes died away into absent thoughtfulness as they slowly and silently descended the hill.

A large party, consisting of Norah and Ishbel, with Mr. Auber, Harold, and Normal Mac Alistair, issued from the garden gate as Esmé and Marchmoram approached the hall door.

They had sat a long time on the Roua Pass, for it now was not far from the dinner hour. In the greetings that followed, Esmé looked a little conscious as she met Mr. Auber's smile of half reproach, and he slightly pressed her hand. And as they all paused for Glenbenrough, hastening from the direction of the square, he had time to whisper,

"I have not been so ill treated since I left

London ; Esme, why did you break your engagement to meet me to-day ?”

“I did not say I would come, Mr. Auber.”

“But you intended it.” And he gave one of his looks of slightly implied satire, which made Esmé look up decisively and say quickly,

“Yes ; I would have come, but Suila would not let me. And I am very glad.”



## CHAPTER III.

## BEN PHEE INN—THE DUAL GHU.

“—— He stood a little forebye,  
For there he heard a fou fause knight  
Tempting his gay ladye.”

“Come doun, come doun, my bonny bird,  
An’ sit upon my hand,  
An’ thou shall hae a cage o’ gowd  
Where thou hast but the wand.  
O! there’s a bird within this bour  
That sings baith sad an’ sweet;  
I’ll tak’ the bird within this bour,  
For it keeps me frae my night’s sleep.”

It was arranged that the whole party should drive over to Phee next morning, the ponies being in waiting to carry them on to the Dual Ghu, as the journey was too fatiguing to be performed on horseback all the

way. Glenbenrough had that day sent a messenger to Miss Christy Macpherson, announcing the intended inroad on her hospitality; and Ishbel was telling the Dreumah gentlemen that they ought to reserve their appetites during dinner, for Mr. Macpherson and his niece would make many appeals to them next morning, when a violent noise at the hall door interrupted conversation.

"Parlons d'un loup!" Harold exclaimed to Norah, as the dining-room door was thrown open and in rushed Miss Christy in *propria persona*, her old straw bonnet crushed over her face, and her best tartan gown a good deal crumpled.

"She has come to escort us in person," Norah whispered to Harold, as poor Christy flew to Glenbenrough; who rose with his usual kindly words of welcome, and that high-bred form of politeness which is ever ready in indiscriminate attention, and unmeasured in degree, to all within its reach.

Sinking into the seat which Glenbenrough

placed beside his own, and without greeting any one, Miss Christy burst forth,

“Colonel Sternbotham! Hech, hech—he’s nearly finished me!”

Every one looked surprised, and the Englishmen with difficulty repressed smiles. Where was Colonel Sternbotham, and where had she been?

Miss Christy soon gained breath to proceed. She had been at Strathshielie for the last week; and Colonel and Mrs. Sternbotham had been there also, not having taken their departure for the South yet. Letters had arrived, however, the day before, which had put the Colonel into urgent haste to return to England; so much so that Lady Mac Neil had begged Miss Christy to escort him personally by a short cut across the country, to where he could intercept the mail-coach on its way southward. As this would be an indecorous mode of travelling for Mrs. Sternbotham, she was to follow at leisure with her maid.

Miss Christy now informed Glenbenrough

that the Colonel was in the drawing-room, and that they had performed the latter part of the journey from Strathshielie in one of her own vehicles—a cart from Phee—which was also to be in waiting next morning to take her and the Colonel on to the inn of Ben Phee, whence he could easily make his way to the destined point of meeting with the mail.

“Ye see, I promised Lady Mac Neil to keep a had o’ him, till I got him safely to Ben Phee Inn; and I’m near worn out wi’ him already. He’s a real helpless bodach o’ a man, and sae pernocity, he wad na let me put a finger on him; though he was like to tumble out o’ the cart. I dared na offer to take hold o’ him; an’ I was near telling him he was as doited wi’ modesty as the Rev. Mr. Mac Gil,” said Miss Christy, turning to Auber, who was her nearest neighbour.

“Who was Mr. Mac Gil, Miss Macpherson? A man of guileless heart, I suppose.”

“He was an evil-minded old gowk, Mr. Auber, begging his pardon; for when he was

upwards o' eighty, he went to pay a visit to my aunt Maggie, who was over seventy-five years old. She, puir body, was delighted to see her old acquaintance.

" 'Come hen, come hen, Mr. Mac Gil,' says she; 'Oh, but I'm glad to see ye. Shut to the door, shut ye close the door, and sit in to the fire wi' me here, till we hae a crack.'

" 'Nae, mem,' says he, 'I'll no do that,' and he opened the door as wide as the hinges would let it; 'I'll no shut the door: ye ken the world's unco' censorious.'

" 'Did you ever hear the like o' that, Mr. Auber, an' he eighty, an' she seventy-five?'

Great was Miss Christy's consternation on hearing of the plan that had been formed for breakfasting at Phee next morning, and sore was the conflict 'twixt duty and inclination; however, she determined unflinchingly to abide by the former: she had promised Lady Mac Neil to escort the Colonel, and it must be done: her Highland honour was pledged.

It was now arranged that all the Glenben-

rough party should breakfast also at the inn of Ben Phee; which took them but a mile or so out of their route, as it lay not far from the house of Phee; and the ponies should be sent on there.

Glenbenrough left the room the moment he was aware of the arrival of Colonel Sternbotham, whom he found seated in the drawing-room in a sadly fatigued state. During the course of the evening it was elicited that the cause of the Colonel's hurried retreat to England was his having heard of the arrival of a long absent sister, at his mansion in Derbyshire; but, in pursuance of the strict etiquette observed by his establishment, she had been waived to the hotel of the neighbouring country town, there to await her brother's arrival and personal welcome, according to his courtly law. The laird thought that if *his* sister had arrived at Glenbenrough under similar circumstances—or even his tenth cousin—she would have been expected to make herself at home at his house under any circumstances; but his Highland hos-

pitality was on a different scale to that of the Colonel's.

Miss Christy passed a sleepless night, tossing restlessly under the idea of the sacrifice she was making in thus losing the opportunity of dispensing the hospitality of Phee. She pictured to herself imaginary breakfasts composed of the delicacies she would have presented to her beloved laird and his English guests, in the shape of bannocks and crowdie,\* heather honey, and candied marmalade, long since laid by for an occasion like this: and as these tantalizing visions of baffled hospitality rose before her, she became quite acrimonious towards the Colonel. She resolved rigidly to adhere to her compact, in seeing that no harm befell him until safely uncartered at Ben Phee; but she determined to be severe and uncompromising in her management of him while it lasted.

By eight o'clock next morning the house

\* Oatmeal cakes and curded milk.

rang with sounds of departure, and various vehicles stood drawn up at the hall door, the Phee cart ignominiously bringing up the rear: it was half filled with straw, and a tartan plaid thrown over it. In this Colonel Sternbotham thought politeness made it imperative on him to travel, it being the conveyance expressly sent for his convenience from the farm-yard at Phee; and Glenbenrough, finding all contrary argument unavailing, resigned him to his fate. Miss Christy, who stood waiting with a huge plaid, ready to fall upon him and hoist him in, set to work to bind him down "weel happed," as she said, but in a way that literally deprived him of the use of hands and feet; and she succeeded, despite all his endeavours at independent action.

Florh Mackenzie was there to accompany the young ladies; and, in the confusion of starting, she whispered to Esmé,

"Will nae my bairn sit by her old nurse for an hour?"

"Certainly, dear Florh," Esmé exclaimed with



alacrity; and she and Florh, in the dog-cart driven by Normal, took the lead in the cavalcade.

Norah, with her usual right feeling, approached the Phee cart, as she felt bound to share the Colonel's company so far; but just as she prepared to get in, he exclaimed in an appalled tone,

"Miss Mac Neil, I, as an old soldier, may bear strange modes of conveyance, but I cannot see you, a young lady, enter so barbarous a vehicle: it is quite unsuitable!"

"Unsuitable? An' what could come unsuitable to a daughter o' the house o' Glenbenrough?" cried Miss Christy in a shrill key, almost into the ear of the Colonel, beside whom she was perched. "Miss Mac Neil no go in a cart! Set up them that says it, indeed! Miss Mac Neil might drive through London town in a cart, and who would daur to think it unsuitable? Get ye up, Miss Norah; what does he ken?"

The early keenness of the morning air tem-

pered the warmth of the sun, which shone out brilliantly as the cavalcade moved on. The road led winding along the base of the hills at the back of the house, and through woods of birch and pine, the sunshine bringing out the varied hues of the foliage, — the bright red wild cherry-leaf, the fading green of the birch, and many-tinted herbage of heather, grass, and fern; and the warmth drawing out the perfume of the larch and pine.

About an hour's drive brought the party down on the inn, so called. It was a wretched thatched house of one story, but standing on a site of exquisite natural beauty, suited for a castle. A herd of ponies were feeding on the grass before the door, and as many men lounged or stood near them, while the ground was strewn with baggage sufficient for a regiment, part of it contributed from the stores of Dreumah; Mr. Marchmoram having ordered additional hampers of wine and luxurious edibles, which made the Highland fare of Glenbenrough seem meagre.

The landlady of the inn of Ben Phee came forward to receive her guests with unbounded pride and pleasure; the glow of a huge turf fire within being reflected on her ruddy sun-burnt face. The breakfast was already partly spread; laid out in style in the best bedroom of the house, there being no sitting-room in the inn of Ben Phee: the kitchen would have been the only alternative, and it was already fully occupied. However, the bedroom, with its sanded floor, painted kists,\* and clean spread table, was welcome to the whole party, unfastidious in general good humour and appetites.

Colonel Sternbotham, who was in high spirits at the approaching dissolution of his connection with Miss Christy, entered the room last; feeling almost reconciled to a barbaric breakfast as a closing scene in the Highlands, now that he seemed fairly on the road back to civilization again. But just as he was taking

\* Chests of drawers

his seat, his eye caught the blue-checked curtains that screened two modest sleeping-places in the wall; and the outrage about to be committed stood revealed. He turned and fled precipitately.

“Vouve! he’s taken the jaundice!” shrieked Miss Christy. “Did ever any one see such a disjaskit expression? Will ye no go an’ see what ails him, laird? What will Lady Mac Neil say to me?”

Glenbenrough followed the retreating guest, and an almost fiery altercation ensued. Even his polite endurance and forbearance to a stranger could endure no longer; and the quickness of his temper rose at the absurd squeamishness of the English Colonel: but no energy could combat prejudice. So determined was Colonel Sternbotham, that if Glenbenrough had ordered a troop of his clansmen to bear him back to the table, a prisoner of war, the Colonel would have shown fight ere he succumbed.

An extraordinary scene now presented itself:

the whole party in the bedroom sat down to a smoking repast, waited on with assiduous attention by the landlady and the Dreumah valets; while the Colonel sat in solitary state in the Phee cart drawn up in front of the house, having a wooden stool for a table, upon which relays of breakfast were served forth to him from the merry board within. He sat there sipping his tea as if it were vinegar, his lurid complexion quite apoplectic in the morning sun. But he was not allowed even the consolation of peace in his solitude; for Miss Christy made constant rushes from her seat to the open window of the bedroom, whence she poured forth vehement appeals and addresses to him.

“Come in, come in! What scunner have ye to the decent bed, man? Mony’s the time I hae slept in it! It’s a’ lined wi’ the ‘Inverness Courier;’ and mony’s the morn I wakened and read wi’ pride before my eyes o’ the Phee butter carrying the first prize at Martinmass Market. What evil is in the body’s head no to tak his meat in here!”

Then she would return to her seat and resume breakfast, eating vigorously as she spoke.

"Ye suld tell him, Glenbenrough, o' the old house o' Kingoll, in your father's life time, where the laird's bed was in the dining-room wa'. Mony's the time ye hae seen it; an' when the laird an' his compeers were over their toddy belate, Lady Kingoll would just gae behind the press door and put on her night gear, an' get into her bed afore them a': an' wha thought the worse o' her, yon times? Wad he compare the bluid in his veins to the old bluid o' the Kingoll's? I trow it's not likely."

The Colonel at last turned his back to the open window, and to all Miss Christy's appeals preserved a strict silence. This aggravated her more and more, and Normal Mac Alistair, skilfully stirring the fires of her wrath, she at last became, to use her own words, "Neither to hold, nor to bind," and she prepared to sally out upon him; and it was only by Norah

and Esmé's joint entreaties that she was restrained.

"Had! had! Miss Esmé, till I be at him! It'll no do to put up wi' it. He's bringing a scandal on all of us here!"

"Nonsense, Miss Christy, he only punishes himself, so pray be quiet."

"Well, gie me your hand, Esmé," she exclaimed with excited expression; "promise me ye'll be upsides wi' him: noo; promise me an' I'll leave him quiet."

"I will try," Esmé said; and, breakfast now being over, she went out to the Colonel, and whispered, *sotto voce*, "We think you should make haste; for if you don't start soon, you will lose the mail, and Miss Christy would then insist on accompanying you back to Strath-shielie, or on remaining with you here until to-morrow."

The effect was magical. The Colonel's complexion turned a pale green colour, and, clambering out of the cart, he ordered a dog-cart to be got ready instantly, to take him on to

the stage where the mail was expected. He seemed altogether in such a wretched state of trepidation, that Miss Christy (who was watching from the window) felt her triumph of vindictiveness complete. She saw that he had been made most uncomfortable; and, though ignorant of the means used, was fully satisfied. She cried aloud to the company,

“Aye, aye, I see she has been upsides wi’ him noo! It was gash o’ me to gie her the preferment: it’s she that has made him!”

There were no witnesses to the final parting between Miss Christy and Colonel Sternbotham; for the ponies were now all saddled and ready, and the whole party mounted and bade them farewell, leaving the couple motionless on the threshold: the Colonel with bending form, as if intently listening for the rescuing wheels of his coming chariot, and Miss Christy grimly erect beside him—a statue of vigilance guarding despair.

Glenbenrough rode in advance, and the others followed *en masse*, down a steep bank to the



edge of the river Dual, which flowed broadly here. It was a stream taking its rise among the distant mountains to which they were bound, and swelled, in its distant course, to much greater breadth and importance than the river Rouagh of Glenbenrough: it bounded and intersected the property of that family for many and many a mile, and the flow of it had been music to the ears of the Mac Neils for many ages back. A track led along the brink, which soon became very precipitous, and the party were obliged to go in single file. The three girls rode their own ponies; Florh was mounted on a strong Galloway, and the gentlemen were all mounted; but a band of gillies brought up the rear on foot, driving before them animals laden with baggage, and ready for any assistance required, or to add to any confusion that might arise.

It required a steady head to look down, as the ponies clambered along the very edge of a precipice overhanging the river, which roared and foamed in turbulent haste over its dark,

rocky bed. The Englishmen of Dreumah could not but admire the easy grace of the Highland girls, as they rode with reins loose on their ponies' necks, and with eyes raised in silent admiration of the scenery around them; without a tinge of fear to mar their enjoyment, and with no foolish or affected nervousness to call for exacting attentions, spoiling the view and the pleasure to the men.

As they ascended, the character of the hills changed; and with the increased altitude, the trees began to disappear. A group of birch scattered here and there, or a few old pines, crazy with age, became prominent amongst the rocks; and the eye wandered on to distant ranges of hills, whose savage grandeur eclipsed all nearer or tamer objects. The foremost of these ran parallel with the opposite bank of the river, rising in colossal tiers, and the bold, dark outlines of their summits standing in strong relief against the bright September sky; while, further on, the hills reared themselves in painted lights of faintest blue, violet, and grey, until

the colours paled away undistinguishable amidst the crowning clouds.

The cavalcade did not proceed in stillness, for conversation was frequently general; each looking back upon his neighbour, and transmitting message or inquiry along the line to the further riders. Auber had not approached Esmé, nor conversed with her since the evening before; nor did she even ever meet his eye. She consequently felt a little inward restlessness: she missed the sound of his low, thrilling voice, and wished for one of his beautiful smiles, undefinable in expression, half tender, half admiring. Anything but indifference: that would gall her.

Esmé had never before in her life so fully appreciated the charm of intellectual sympathy. In the society, now familiar to her, of Auber and Marchmoram, she was drinking deeply and unrestrainedly, an enjoyment the most exquisite that earth could afford her. The powers of her mind were roused; her imagination had free scope, and she gave expression

to her wildest flights of fancy: and when she spoke, she received either sympathy or strength in return. Of the former, she felt always sure, for even when Auber gave one of those smiles which pleased her less than the absent gravity of Marchmoram, he showed a feeling of interest.

In the conversations past, which she had held with Auber, what was it that saved Esmé from staking her all, and allowing her spirit to be carried away by the waves of passion? How was she saved from falling deeply in love? By a pervading feeling that Auber was not true. While he spoke, she was absorbed in the momentary pleasure she derived from the subtle harmony of his thoughts and language; but when he ceased, and she looked up in the silence, her own eyes burning with intellectual excitement, to meet his look, she would find, perhaps, his head thrown back and an abstracted half smile of complacency on his face, as if he were pleased at playing his part so well. This struck her with a chill feeling of misgiving. Had he been saying what he

did not feel? Her mind had been gratified, but her heart had not been satisfied. Then, ever and anon, he would utter some cold, worldly maxim, which would darken the brightness of his high-flown sentiment.

It will have been seen that some of the more refined elements of the coquette belonged to Esmé's individuality. She liked the secret power over Normal's allegiance, which she felt lingered within her grasp. It had belonged to her from childish years, and the very reserve with which his pride guarded it from her view, made her seek to get occasional glimpses of it. Then her foster mother Florh, who held powerful influence over them both, and who depended upon it for realizing the greatest ends her lowly ambition could reach to, never ceased to try, by rousing Esmé's passionate love for the Highlands, to make her connect Normal with it as personifying Highland nobleness in character and position.

Normal, however, had been but the forerunner of Auber in her interest, and held but divided

sway. Was not Auber, who had tried to awaken her feelings, destined to accomplish it? It was but a single element wanting in him that prevented it; and this might not have been missed, but that she saw it embodied in a third man—one whom she *might* have been born for.

Auber would not have supported her in that fearful day on Corrieandhu: she would have shrunk from help from him. His spirit was a cold clear flame, beautiful to her gaze; but she had never approached it for warmth. Early selfishness or betrayal had burnt out the fire of his heart. She felt she must not turn to him in weakness; he might turn away from her: her beauty must be bright, her spirit un-failing, when she sought communion with him. Normal, with his strong arm, would have borne her through the storm; but he was so familiar with wreathing mists and weather battles, he could not have felt the sympathy which her fainting strength required: he would have, perhaps, smiled, and rallied Esmé, as he car-

ried her on ; for he had often seen her brave as rough a storm before.

But Marchmoram ! to him she had flown as a dove to the shelter of a leafy oak : with him was all that was wanted elsewhere. That form of inflexible strength and that Spartan face, lighted by eyes that might gleam in softest tenderness on her, or turn in consuming rage on him who dared to molest ! Marchmoram—with his iron will, and high ambition—when with him, she felt the wondrous support of his character ; which would have strengthened the nobler and the better part of hers : his materialism would have been compensated by her spiritualism. But Marchmoram's evil genius averted his regard from the soul-love that burnt clear and pure in Esmé's heart—a beacon that might warn him from the rocks and shoals amongst which ambition was driving that noble vessel.

The track which the riding-party had pursued brought them down to the level of the river. A wide expanse of dark mossy ground, diver-

sified by pools of bog-coloured water, stretched on, far as eye could reach, to the foot of a barrier of grey rocky hills. A sort of causeway of huge slabs of rock and flat stones, had been laid along the surface of the moss at intervals, indicating the route up to the base of these hills. It was curious to note the sagacity of the ponies, as they followed it: putting their fore feet closely together, they sprang like goats from stone to stone: a single slip would have sent horse and rider floundering into the bog. At last the base of the barrier hills was reached, and, not without an effort, the animals scrambled on to it; when, encouraged by shrill Gaelic cries and whoops from the gillies, they clambered up the steep and rugged ascent, taking at a bound the rocks in their way.

A sort of rugged ravine or cleft was gained at the top, and through this the ponies passed one by one. Assembling on the other side upon a broad ledge of heathery grass, they found themselves in view of the Dual Ghu. A



flight of steps, cut into the almost perpendicular side of the rock, led down to the river, which ran broadly beneath, and was crossed by stepping-stones. Then a long sweep of natural grass brought them up to the shealing—a low range of turfed hutting, from which blue clouds of smoke were issuing. There the tents were pitched; cows and goats were grazing around them, and a band of kilted men and rough-coated colly-dogs were dispersed over the ground. Hills upon hills rose towering over each other, forming a majestic amphitheatre, at once grandly crowning and closing in the scene.

A curious dwelling would the shealing of Dual Ghu have seemed to delicate English girls; and yet, had they abode there for a summer month, it would likely have reinstated the health of many a “Belle of the Season,” worn out with London dissipation.

It consisted of several small rooms, separated from a large one used as a kitchen, and divided from each other merely by a wainscoting of twisted birch twigs. The windows never had

known glass, and a wooden shutter excluded light and air at night. The air being the favourite element of the Miss Mac Neils, they did not use the shutter; and, ere falling asleep at night, they could return the clear calm gaze of the moon, as she poured her silver radiance upon the grey mountain summits; while the turf smoke, which strongly impregnated their room, found egress at the open window.

This shealing was the abode of the shepherds and milkmaids of the flocks and herds of Mr. Macrae, the patriarchal tenant; and they were now all housed within it: the two rooms occupied by the girls and nurse Florh being always held exempt, and ready for the use of the laird himself when he came each autumn to shoot.

The tent which Glenbenrough and Normal occupied, had a small sleeping place partitioned off, and the centre now served for the general dining hall, wherein the daily breakfasts and dinners were served up in *fête champêtre* style. A great part of the cooking took place at a huge fire-place in the open air, where

the smoke being less condensed than in the low-raftered reeking kitchen of the shealing, the viands were served up without a peaty flavour.

Next morning, soon after sun-rise, and while the gentlemen were still enfolded in their tents, Florh aroused her young ladies, who sallied forth with her to the banks of the river which ran at the back of the shealing. Circles of stones built in the water, which here ran deep and silent, marked rural baths, formed years before under the direction of Norah; and in they plunged from the high and shelving bank, each into her own clear pool; and their complexions, as they ran back in the bracing sunny air to complete their toilettes, testified to the healthy influence of the bath.

Immediately after breakfast the gentlemen went out to the hills, with dogs and guns and gillies, forming a strong party. They lunched on the peak of a hill many miles from the encampment, and the echoes of their returning shots did not announce their coming towards home again until in time for a late dinner.

The girls, nevertheless, spent a busy day: they proceeded to the river, and, at a little distance, among sheltering rocks, and on a smooth platform of heather grass, they constructed a drawing-room in the open air. Seats were built of stones, and a table was formed of wood and turf; crevices in the rocks served as windows, and were trellised by curtains and festoons of deer's-grass and bog myrtle; a fire-place, also, was contrived, and blazing logs of pine and birch sent up such a beacon flame to the hills, that the little kids came down in flocks, and perched on the rocky heights of the drawing-room walls, gazing in wonder on the doings beneath.

The gentlemen returned just in time for dinner: their sport had been excellent, and their fatigue great; the hills being steeper here than around Dreumah. Mr. Marchmoram had bagged twenty-nine brace of birds, Auber nineteen, and Harold twenty-five: a capital day's work for the 25th of September.

Normal alone had gone after the deer, having

followed a contrary beat to the others. He had shot a stag of royal head, and was in the highest spirits imaginable. Sport and natural history formed great part of the conversation at the tent dinner, and Normal described an incident he had witnessed that day, in which both were combined.

“Fancy, Glenbenrough! I saw, while crouching with Sandie behind the rock on the shoulder of Benaldie—an old fox deer-stalking! I suppose I might live to a hundred and not see such a thing again. It was so curious that I forgot my own stalk in watching reynard’s. A nice little herd of hinds, with two of their calves amongst them, were grazing beneath, when suddenly a move took place, and they all looked about, sniffing uneasily. We knew it was not us, as we were all right, and the wind blowing contrary. Presently, Sandie called out ‘Look! look!’ and there, on the lower hill, right opposite us, we saw an old fox squatting behind a stone, watching the deer, exactly like ourselves; but the wind was evidently blowing his

scent right down upon them. As they moved, he moved, until they set off at a startled trot round the base of the hill. Sandie and I darted higher up, and we saw the fox turn round and distinctly retrace his course; running up the hill, down he came on the other side, meeting the deer in their circuit! The scent, having altered, they quietly took to grazing again. He now began to creep on his stomach, dragging his body after him, foot by foot, until he got within a few yards of the deer, when he slunk behind a stone; and there he sat like a dog, on his hind quarters, with ears cocked, watching his game."

"But what had he in view, Normal?" Ishbel asked.

"Of course he wanted the young calves."

"He would not have attempted to touch them, when guarded by their mothers, surely?"

"No, he was too cunning for that; but, you know, the hinds leave their calves when very young, just as sheep do their lambs, amongst the rocks sometimes, while they go feeding

in the neighbourhood. Ewen told me he was one day on the hill at Arduashein, watching a herd grazing, when suddenly he heard a squeaking noise, and one of the hinds galloped past to some underwood, where she had her calf concealed; and there, sure enough, was a fox at its throat. She reared up and beat him off with her fore hoofs, uttering loud cries, until the whole herd gathered around her; and in a few moments reynard was in full chase, pursued by the whole troop, out of sight!"

After dinner the gentlemen proposed a very short adjournment to the drawing-room; which the young ladies had described to them, just to see how it looked in the moonlight. Accordingly, the whole party sallied forth; Ishbel leading the way, holding her father's hand. The night was still and starry; the moon swept majestically over a deep blue sky; the river shone and sparkled in her beams, and every tint on hill and rock showed distinctly. It was a night so beautiful in its heavenly splen-

dour that you almost wished to hush the merry voices breaking the silence.

Auber moved away from the others and stood alone upon a low rock at the river's edge; Marchmoram was jesting with Ishbel, who still kept close at her father's side, and Harold was in converse with Norah.

Esmé met a glance from the dark eyes of Auber, who advanced, and asked her to come down to the water; he gave her his hand to descend the rocks, and then, as they stood there, he spoke. The music of his voice mingled magically with the rippling of the waters; his words flowed in exquisite imagery of thought and language. No wonder Esmé felt fascinated. And when he told her that the moon made glorious the golden light of her hair, as he lifted up the long tresses and pressed them to his lips; and, taking her hand within both his, asked her why it was so cold, Esmé's heart beat strongly and fast. He told her of a beautiful wild loch, studded with water-lilies, which he had discovered among



the hills; and that if she would come he would take her there to-morrow. Esmé whispered soft and low, "Yes, I will come."

When they all returned to the tent, coffee was served, and then Glenbenrough proposed a general good night; for the keen air and exercise of the past day called for early rest and sleep. He escorted his daughters to their shealing, and then sought his own couch in the tent; where he fell asleep with a heart and conscience freer and more unburdened than any other there—little Ishbel's, perhaps, alone excepted.

The sportsmen again started early next morning on their different beats; and the girls sallied to their drawing-room and sat there part of the forenoon, with the companionship of Florh and books. At last they thought of their fishing-rods, which were lying on the thatched roof of the shealing. It was so low that an outstretched arm could easily reach them; indeed, the goats sometimes fancied a nibble on the top of the house, and sprang to it easily

from the ground. So Florh went for the rods, and then she proceeded to the river with Norah and Ishbel.

Esmé remained. She had heard a dog bark, and had seen Auber descending the opposite hill. He went to the tent, left his gun, despatched his gillies, and then came towards where she sat. He asked her if she was ready to visit the water-lilies, and she rose and went with him. He led her through a gorge betwixt the hills, which were wholly unwooded at the Dual Ghu, along a path worn and channeled by the frequent floodings of the mountain torrents dashing down the rocky walls on every side.

The gorge was steep and grand; it extended for nearly a mile, and then suddenly opened out upon a fairy spot of verdure. Banks of natural grass swept down to the edge of a lovely little loch, covered with water-lilies and thickly fringed round by weeping birches. The deer of the glen often came to drink, but never had an Englishman's foot rested here before. Auber led Esmé down to

the edge, and proposed that they should sit them down and rest ere they gathered the water-lilies—for this flower quickly fades.

“Do you understand the creed of Platonism, Esmé?”

“Yes, I think I do: I have read of it, Mr. Auber.”

“But you have no sympathy with it? No, I can answer for you. Twenty years hence will be the time for you to enter into its safe requirements. You possess the qualities necessary for its enjoyment, for you are intellectually conversible, Esme; but they should lie latent until the way is prepared: the warmer promptings must be satisfied first. Esmé, you are so gifted that, if you do not shipwreck your happiness by trying to keep too close to narrow-bound friendly shores instead of bearing out boldly to the open boundless sea, you may have great enjoyment of life! You are eminently fitted for both love and friendship; but you should defer the latter until you have exhausted the powers of the first. You are

Marchmoram's little friend, I think?" he added abruptly.

Esmé, who had sat silent, her eyes fixed on the water, now started and blushed; but with all his art, Auber did not then guess why; for he boldly asked,

"Do you think giving a kiss is a very naughty thing, Esmé?" And then, not to startle her by any fancied danger in the question, he took up some pebbles and flung them carelessly into the water.

"I never kiss any man save my father, Mr. Auber."

"Not even your cousin Normal?"

"No: not since the time we were children. Scotchmen don't care for kissing," Esme added half absently.

Auber laughed. "Well, but you don't think there is any harm in it? Depend on it, kissing is as natural as shaking hands; and the conventionality which denies this is a most absurd one: it has only crept in within latter years!"

"You mean that it used to be the mode of

salutation with our grandsires?" Esmé said, looking steadily at him. "I am glad I did not live in those days; my sense of propriety would have suffered sorely."

"Yes, when inclination was not consulted on the subject; but—but—that makes all the difference: when you are married, Esmé, you will kiss your husband very often!"

Esmé blushed deeply. He went on to say, with a softly searching smile and look,

"I am sure you very well understand the 'Love's Philosophy' of your favourite, Shelley: this is a day to repeat it." Esmé sank her head a little, and as he repeated the last lines she almost felt his breath stirring in the long golden ringlets of her hair:

"The fountains mingle with the river,  
And the river with the ocean,  
The winds of heaven mix for ever  
With a sweet emotion;  
Nothing in the world is single;  
All things by a law divine  
In one another's being mingle—  
Why not I with thine?"

"See the mountains kiss high heaven,  
And the waves clasp one another;  
No sister flower would be forgiven  
If it disdained it's brother:  
And the sunlight clasps the earth,  
And the moonbeams kiss the sea;  
What are all these kissings worth  
If thou kiss not me?"

"Now, Esmé, will you kiss me?" he whispered, in a tone thrilling through the quick life-pulses of the girl. "I do not ask you to let me kiss you. Merely give me an innocent kiss upon my brow. It will be like balm to me, Esmé, for I am very wearied of the world."

His power was upon her: and, pursuing his advantage, he would have passed his arm around her waist; but, with a convulsive effort, she drew his arm away, and, keeping hold of his hand, replied, with averted face,

"No, no, no, never, Mr. Auber! Don't speak in this way to me."

"Ah, Esmé, give me one kiss of compassion, innocent and pure from your heart! chaste as

the moonbeam on the troubled sea! I ask it not to allay the fever of a young and ardent spirit, but to calm and cheer a poor worn-out mind. Esme, were I to tell you the story of my life, I feel I could again and again draw forth a sad and gentle kiss of compassion: 'tis all I ask."

Esmé put her hands before her face; for his voice touched the very depths of her womanly nature. Had Marchmoram been in Auber's place and craved what he did, the hot blood would have mounted from heart to brain, and she would have risen and fled from him as from dangerous temptation. As it was, with a suppressed sigh and suffused face, Esmé lifted up her head, and looking fully and gently into Auber's face, said,

"No, Mr. Auber, I will not: I cannot. You should not have asked it."

He gave her a reproachful smile, and then rose up. The blush was still upon her cheek. He broke down a branch from a birch tree and, going down to the water's edge, began to draw in the lilies.

"Marchmoram told me you called these Passion-flowers, Esmé?"

"Yes; I so delight in them."

"And do you know what passion is? 'Tis a craving admiration: when you see them in their beauty you long to possess, and can't rest satisfied with the admiration of the eye. I have noted it, in the midst of exquisite scenery, by the quiver on your lip and the flush upon your brow: I read your inward feeling. You could throw yourself upon the purple heather, bask upon it, gather it in handfuls, and enjoy its elasticity and warm dry perfume. In looking down, in summer, from a burning height, upon waving seas of cool delicious green forests of birchen trees in full foliage, do you not long to spring down upon the leaves and revel and float amongst them, as you would seek to bathe in the sparkling waters of clear, tempting streams? This, Esmé, is passion, though mysterious and unacknowledged. Aye, refine it as you will, this thirst for nature and beauty is *passion* pervading your nature!"



Esme's blue eyes assumed a deeper hue, dilating softly as, after a moment's hesitation, she replied,

"No, Mr. Auber; there is no earthiness in that passion: in the thirst after enjoyment of the beautiful, as you have described it. That enthusiasm and rapturous love for nature is but the longing for the bliss which 'eye hath not seen, neither hath it entered in the heart of man to conceive;' but which all that is purer in our earthly nature gives us a mysterious undefinable aspiration for! When the rainbow glories of the morning sky tempt the spirit to revel in its light of crimson and gold, or when we bow before the moonlight glory of the grand old hills, it is but an unknown spiritual appreciation of that more exceeding glory, striving against all the material feelings of our nature: it is very different from the passion you would have inferred."

Auber stood perfectly silent as she ceased speaking. A shade of sadness passed over his pale, dark face: his heart was touched: he

felt foiled and rebuked. Yet he had not spoken falsely, when he had told Esmé he was world-wearied: he was, and long had been. There was strength in the resolution of this young and sensitive girl, and the pure vitality of her nature kindled in him (*blasé*, worn-out, and unbelieving as he was) fresher feelings. He forgot that he had essayed to vitiate her. His voice was calm as he spoke:

“Esmé, an essay, which I read as a boy long years back, returns to my memory. The writer conceives a man standing on the green margin of this world,—its varied scenes of homely comfort spread around him. He gazes upon the gloom of fathomless space beyond, and would not exchange, for the unknown abyss before him, the pleasant earth on which he stands, with its cerulean canopy and sunny social homes; so he keeps his footing firm, and clings to the soil, lest he should fall from his position. But if, as he stood, some happy island of the blest had come floating by, the light of its surpassing glories bursting upon his senses with

sounds of sweetest melody, and beings of purest ethereal beauty disporting on it, free from pain and mortality, waving signals of welcome; would he not spurn the earthly hemisphere, and, with ardent flight, forgetful of the dark space between, and lighted now by the beatific scene within his reach, spring upward to reach the elysium in space? Esmé, I believe in this picture: I too would take the leap, if I but knew how to make it sure—if I dared!” and he gave her a quick kiss upon her brow.

“Mr. Auber!” she exclaimed indignantly, as she sprung back, startled tears of pride rising to her eyes; “I shall never trust myself with you again.”

“Esmé, you are but a child; I kissed you as a child. O Esmé! I would like to make you mine—to take you away with me and make you happy as a child. I would tell you of things of which you as yet know nothing; give you pleasures you have as yet scarcely dreamed of; take you to lands whose beauty

would make you forget your Highlands. You should be my little treasure, carefully guarded wheresoe'er we went: my precious child companion! Would you come with me thus, if it were possible?"

"You speak of platonic love now. I understand it very well," Esmé replied; "but if I am Mr. Marchmoram's little friend, I should go with him!" And she smiled archly, like a child, and with as much fearlessness.

"Don't trust Godfrey Marchmoram, he is no disciple of Plato."

Esmé blushed again, and said, "Now we must return to the Dual Ghu, Mr. Auber; we will fill my hat with the lilies, and I will make a basin for them in the river, which will keep them long fresh."

"Do you ever dream?" she asked, as they re-entered the gorge to return; "I had a strange dream about you, last night."

"What was it, Esmé?"

"I dreamt I saw you riding at full speed upon a large black horse; your hair was mixed

with grey. A young girl in white, with streaming raven hair, was seated by you; a wreath of vine leaves on her head, and her eyes flashed wildly as if with insanity; one arm was clasped tightly round you, and with the other she urged on the horse to greater speed."

A dark frown gathered over Auber's face; he turned and looked at Esmé, then gave a slight laugh.

"You must have been thinking over some of the romantic tales of your German governess."

"No, indeed! it was a painful dream: there was more in it than that; but I don't well remember all."

"Well, believe it, Esmé, if you like. Perhaps that girl was an evil angel: I don't think I could have ridden pleasantly with her! *You* must be my good angel."

They reached the shealing, and parted. Auber went up the hill to see if any of the returning sportsmen were in sight; Esmé entered her

little sleeping-room. Norah and Ishbel were still at the river.

Esmé threw her hat with the lilies upon the floor, and buried her face on the pillow of her little bed. She wept and she prayed. Poor Esmé! the penalty with her had ever to be paid. Too strong the impulse, and too sensitive the conscience; the struggle between them often came. She sobbed in bitterness, and wrung her hands with convulsive vehemence, as she exclaimed,

“I wish I had never known them! I wish they had never come! I know I shall be miserable. Florh, Florh, my warning dream will come true! Oh, Godfrey Marchmoram, what shall I do?”

One had stood upon the heights above the little loch that day. He had sat him down to watch the deer, when his keen eye fell upon the two figures beneath. He raised his glass, and he marked the kiss that Auber gave.

When Auber and Esmé moved homewards

he turned also, and very soon after their arrival Marchmoram went into his tent and laid aside his deer-stalking glass.

CHAPTER IV.

A HIGHLAND VASSAL'S HOSPITALITY—  
SECRET INFLUENCES.

"O' there is ane, a secret ane,—  
Aboon them a' I like him better."

"Thy step maun be the first, Charlie,  
'Mang the free and brave:  
There's a crown an' throne for thee, Charlie!  
For me ———"

WE must now revert to Florh Mackenzie, Esmé's foster mother, who had latterly kept silent and aloof. There were weighty matters on Florh's mind. She had not spoken to Esmé again on the subject of Jeanie Cameron and the Italian valet's surmise of her guilt with



Mr. Marchmoram, since that evening at Glenbenrough; yet not the less, but rather the more, strongly did her own views concentrate on that, and on another subject as also partly connected with it.

Florh had ever possessed great influence over Esmé, not only as being her foster mother (a very strong tie in the Highlands), but from the knowledge she had of Esmé's disposition, and the consummate native tact with which her keen shrewdness helped her to use it. Next to her son Ewen, Florh loved her foster children, Esmé Mac Neil and Normal Mac Alistair, best of all on earth; and the union of these two had ever been her chiefest project: she regarded their mutual happiness, and the advancement of her son, as dependent on its accomplishment.

Ewen's fortunes hung upon his young master's; for he never would have sought the drudgery of any other service; and with Esmé as his mistress, Florh knew he would be safe for life in the indulgence of a foster brother and sister.

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Florh's foresight extended even on to his old age, and she fancied him installed in the snugest shealing in Arduashien. She had ever regarded Esmé's nature as an impetuous torrent full of breaks and windings, but she felt sure that all she had to do was to follow and watch its devious course; and that, as its force exhausted itself, the stream would flow calmly at last: so she had seldom alluded much to any fancied love on either side; only by occasional words she let Esmé see that fate quite intended she should be the wife of Normal and Lady of Arduashien, and that Ewen should devote the latter days of his life to her and Normal's service.

Now, however, unforeseen clouds hung darkening over the sunny landscape of her prospects; and how to watch and avert the coming storm and ruin, required all that mental strength and tact which intuitively this Highland peasant woman felt she possessed. So to Florh Mackenzie pondering nightly on her heather bed, her mental plans of strategy and careful prevision

connected with these few human beings, appeared a scheme involving as much boldness, risk, and difficulty as ever taxed the mind of a statesman. That early dream of Esmé's which she had read so strangely true,—was it not immediately afterwards that the man of that name had alighted in Glenbenrough? The intimacy of Godfrey Marchmoram with Esmé had progressed; and, even though all outward appearances had contradicted it, Florh would have felt that a mutual interest must ensue betwixt him and Esmé: some dangerous crisis must arise sooner or later; for her predictions never failed.

Even now she saw the coming danger; for the dream was in process of fulfilment. There was Norah, whose calm soft eye drooped too frequently beneath the bright gaze of English Harold, and followed too steadfastly his every graceful movement and gesture. However, all was sunshine here: truth and honour were read distinctly in Harold's noble countenance: even Florh's eye fell not coldly on him. She knew Norah possessed strength as well

as grace, and as much discretion as modesty : peace was her destiny. Even in the dream, had she not been saved ?

But Esmé, dear Esmé ! A pang of jealousy, for the sake of her favourite bairn, shot through Florh's brain. Should she be swept away ? No ! not while her foster mother had strength to stretch forth her helping arm, and guide her to safe and friendly protection.

Hatred of Marchmoram was deeply rooting in Florh's lowly but resolute heart. Could she think herself quite equal to him, and able to avert his influence from her foster children ? for if he won Esmé's heart did he not also stab Normal's ? Were she able finally to regain Jeanie—the bride long promised, now blighted—for her best beloved son Ewen, she could have nearly forgiven all, in the triumph of her ultimate success ; but were she defeated, and all these evils to come upon her, then the end of her life would be blackness.

Normal had not taken Ewen with him to the Dual Ghu. The evening before the party

left Glenbenrough, Norah had asked him not to do so, as it was evident he was disagreeable to Mr. Marchmoram; so Normal had assented. Ewen was aware of the cause of his being left behind, and his mother learnt it also. With Ewen it rankled deeply: yet he occupied himself by taking a little journey on Mr. Marchmoram's behalf, which he had arranged to do some time before.

Florh was well aware that to succeed in her plans she must be herself subdued and patient. She betrayed no feeling which might mar any influence or interest at Glenbenrough. When Marchmoram crossed her path at Dual Ghu, she dropped a courtesy and gave him honied smiles; for she knew she must not exert against him aught but the strength of cunning. To Ishbel she occasionally confided a few gibes against the Englishmen of Dreumah; but when Ishbel tried, with all her powers of argument, to change Florh's opinions she would generally find herself worsted by some unanswerable Scottish prejudice.

"Florh, dear, Mr. Marchmoram is a prouder looking man than any of our chiefs you could mention."

"Aye, but who knows his pedigree? Could he prove to us his extraction?"

"Well, Florh, no one seems to be more humble to him than yourself; or to like him better, if he speaks to you!"

"Ishbel, Ishbel, mind the old proverb — I go by it:

'It's aye guid to be ceevil,

As the old wife said when she bekit to the *deevil*.'

We should beck to power wherever we meet it."

Florh was a wondrous pleasant companion. She sat on the river banks with the girls, and sang wild Gaelic songs to them, or told them tales of bygone Highland days and families; she wandered up the hills and taught them the properties of different herbs; of the two wild orchids, one of which makes a potent love-philtre, and the other cures the stricken flocks of the shepherd; and of the bog-myrtle,

famed as a spell against Brownie, and for use at the rites of Hallowe'en. The girls turned the latter to epicurean purpose, and taught the Dreumah men that a few sprigs of it dipped in claret and water, gives an aromatic flavour never equalled by borage.

Florh's companionship formed one of the piquant enjoyments of this out-door life, for she studied to make it as congenial as possible; while her keen observation of each and all was unceasing. The truest pleasure to her was the daily proximity of her beloved Normal: it was but seldom that she could see him so continuously as now; and her chief moments of mental relaxation were when, from her evening seat by the shealing door, she proudly compared his manly form and bearing with those of the Englishmen (for Normal always wore the Highland dress), or triumphantly saw his gillies returning laden with better spoil than their's.

On the day that Esmé had gone to the water-lily loch, two dishes of fish, caught by Norah

and Ishbel, graced the dinner table. They consisted of trout, and a large pike roasted; the latter having been a capture of Norah's. All the gentlemen, as in gallantry bound, praised this sport of the young ladies; and Harold in particular, after much discussion on fishing in general, hinted at last that he would prefer it to shooting, if allowed his choice. Esmé offered her rod with alacrity and it was settled he should try and catch a pike the next morning, in company with Norah and Ishbel. This little arrangement suddenly extended into a much more comprehensive one, and some of those present thought Harold's spirits consequently lowered again: he looked anything but gregariously inclined. However, he brightened up a few moments afterwards on whispering to Norah, "This must not count for *our* fishing day; it has only been postponed."

Glenbenrough proposed that the whole party should fish up the river as far as the dwelling of Mr. Macrae, the tenant of the Dual Ghu; and that there they should lunch, and either



ride or walk back in the evening. Accordingly, with the laird's usual promptness, a gillie was at once despatched, and had got half way there, ere dinner was over; bearing a mandate to the old vassal, bidding him prepare to give them welcome on the morrow.

The river was navigable for a coble up to within a hundred yards of Macrae's house; it ran on a level through the hills up to that point, and then the waters deepened, and in broken rapids, amidst sunken and sharp-edged rocks, rushed on to two broad deep falls, the roaring of which was a nightly lullaby to the people in the house. The path was a scrambling one the whole way along the river.

Next morning the whole party started from the shealing with fishing gear and tackle. The coble was for the use of those who fished with the otter;\* and rude rods of birch, with pieces

\* A wooden board, leaded so as to float perpendicularly, and adjusted by laniards on the principles of the kite; the leading string furnished with swivels and fippets, to which the hooks are attached.

of scarlet fringe, cut from Florh's shawl, tied on to the line, were in readiness for those who wished to tempt the pike. As they progressed irregularly down the river, Norah, Ishbel, and Harold made rather a noisy party in the boat, and the "otter" scarce needed any eccentric twitch, for the jerking and meandering course of the coble, as they pulled contrary strokes and shifted from side to side, made the "otter" dance more vigorously than needful.

Esmé, Normal, and Marchmoram fished for the pike over the edge of the bank; the latter would have condescended to no other kind of fishing, but the slaying of this "tyrant of the flood" gave him some excitement. It gratified him to strike an almost savage blow upon the cruel, open mouth of the fish as it gasped on the shore. They were successful, and caught four large pike.

When about half a mile from the rapids, Glenbenrough called to the boat party to land, as the path to the house diverged a little from the river's course. They had caught a few

trout despite the disadvantageous handling of the "otter," and all the rods, the slain pike, etc., were put into the coble. Harold volunteered to row it further up, to where a small wooden pier ran out; and, fastening it there, a bearer from the house could run down for the fish, which were to figure at the luncheon.

As they all turned up the bank, Glenbenrough called to Harold to row steadily when he came near the pier, for if he shot a very few yards past it the boat might run into the rapids. Norah walked last of the party, and it so happened that she stopped twice to fasten the ribbon of her shoe; both times she met the straining gaze of Harold, as he pulled slowly out of sight, and both times a deeper glow of pleasure tinged her cheek. He looked very handsome in his loose shepherd tartan dress: it suited his tall, athletic figure, and the sun-bright English complexion, with masses of chesnut hair clustering on a brow that showed intellect as well as birth,—a clear, high patrician brow, with truthful eyes of pure blue. Never

did face attest more vividly the nobleness of nature. When Norah disappeared, Harold fell into a brown study, which the soothing ripple of the water encouraged: it was a waking dream; but the reverse of what such usually are, for it was mentally safe and healthy, though leading him into personal danger.

The path led down to a small old house, built of dark slatestone, with curious little windows like loop-holes: from these Prince Charlie had often looked out upon the huge bleak guardian hills encasing him in on every side, for he had more than once found shelter there in his wanderings. Upon the rocky background, for the sheep and cattle, stood large fanks; low stone walls, forming a square and divided into compartments: in them the division and wool-clipping of the sheep takes place in summer, and the cattle seek shelter in the storms of winter. A few green birches were scattered over the bank in front; it sloped down to the river, which went seething and boiling past in quite a different mood from that it showed

higher up. Intervening banks concealed the mighty fall, from whence the water rushed on in dark turbulent haste; but the noise of it sufficiently told its power and depth.

Old Macrae came down to meet them, surrounded by a staff of shepherds; he bore a huge green bottle filled with whisky, and a glass of antediluvian shape, and, trembling with nervous delight, he welcomed his beloved laird and his family, pouring out a bumper with upraised hand and giving the old Gaelic toast, which conferred, in the eyes of the Highlanders, only legitimate honour. "Mac Neil agus an Righ!"\* Then, first sipping from the glass himself, he handed it round to all present.

The room which the party were shown into was, indeed, bare of furniture; but the more space remained for the large deal table, which, covered by a snow white table-cloth, occupied the centre. Abundant materials for a proper Highland feast were spread upon it: a choice

\* Mac Neil and the King.

venison ham, smoked and dried a year ago; grouse and kippered salmon; fresh fish from the river; eggs boiled, roasted, and fried; goat-milk cheese, and oat cakes. Small wooden dishes, filled with rich curds and cream, were placed beside each plate. A huge turf fire blazed on the hearthstone, and a table drawn near it bore a goodly array of bottles of spruce beer and smuggled whisky; sugar and steaming kettles of water being ready to meet any demand for toddy.

The sight of this collation, coupled with the previous hours of exercise, roused every appetite; but Glenbenrough declared that a few minutes grace must be given to Harold, who had so unselfishly gone through his solitary duty with the coble. He ought, indeed, to have been there before them, for they had taken a circuit when they left the river; and as the allotted moments passed, every one said he must have mistaken the way.

Meanwhile Harold had rowed slowly down the river, his eye lingering on the vanishing

scene before him, when a sudden jerk aroused him from a reverie, and shook him on his seat; the coble, at the same instant, darted forward with an impetuosity that almost pulled the oar from his hand, and in a moment his eye caught the little wooden pier, jutting out nearly ten yards higher up. The rapids lay not two yards below, and he was already in the rush of the water. He heard the roaring of the fall a little further on: his danger was imminent.

With lips compressed and knitted brow, Harold put out the full strength of his arm, and with the weak oar battled manfully against the striving current. But what could physical strength and will do with so frail a boat? Too unequal was the struggle against the momentarily-increasing stress of the current, which hurried the creaking boat on to its destruction.

A moment's indecision, and Harold would have been surely lost; but his self-possession failed not: with every muscle braced, with steady nerve, and an eye watchful and keen,

he stood balancing himself in the rocking boat, ready to make a spring at the critical moment. A ridge of rock ran out amidst the spray, which almost veiled the first grand leap of the fall; and this slippery rock was his only hope of safety.

As he sprang, the coble rebounded beneath him, and then, lightened, drifted on to the edge of the fall. He clung to the slippery rock, over which the boiling eddy burst in a cloud of spray: the rush of the water nearly deafened him; but his nerves were well strung, and unflinchingly he kept his hold. Then, clutching at each crevice in the rock, he clomb up, his hands bleeding as he slowly and painfully advanced, until he reached the top; when he slid to the point nearest the shore, from which he was separated by a deep dark pool. Dashing the spray from his eyes, he marked where the eddy ran close to the edge beneath him; then, with a bound, he plunged right into the centre of the pool, beyond the eddy, and swam to the bank. He scrambled up and stood upon



the heather, shaking the wet from him like a water dog; and then, with an upward glance at the bright blue sky, he ejaculated a few earnest, heartfelt words of thankfulness to God.

Old Macrae was not aware of the absence of one of the party, or that they waited for him; but while Glenbenrough within was talking of sending a gillie in search of Harold, the old man, standing at the open window, saw something that made him hastily leave the room. Had it been a deed of murder, or an apparition, his sense of hospitality would have restrained the audible expression of any emotion, lest it might alarm or disturb his guests; but once out of the room, he hurried down to the river bank, and there he saw the riven planks of a coble floating past. There must have been death on the water—whose he knew not; but it might even have been his only son, who had rowed up the river from the wooden pier that morning. Twice in his own long life had the waterfall carried a corpse to his door. Uttering low moans of “Och hone! och hone!”

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and grasping his staff in his hand, the old man ran up the rocky path, and scrambled up and down the edge of the fall, his eye seeking restlessly the pools above and beneath; when suddenly he came in sight of Harold, walking leisurely down the path. Harold hailed Macrae with his clear, kindly voice:

“Good day, Mr. Macrae. Where are you going?”

“Going!” exclaimed the old man, with a face of awe and terror. “A boat has swirled past from the fall, and I am going a sorrowful gait to find the corpse.”

“Go no further, Mr. Macrae; here it is!” and smiling with playful *sang froid*, Harold turned the old man by the shoulder homewards. For a moment Macrae was dumb; then seizing Harold’s arm, he clapped him vehemently on the shoulder, and burst forth into a flow of high-wrought Gaelic eulogium. Here was the spirit of Highland valour—contempt of life and danger! It went home straight to the old man’s heart, and called up memories of

the past age—Mac Neils and Macraes of ancient days, who would laugh at death, in sport or war.

Macrae had not been gone ten minutes, when one of the shepherds, who had also observed the floating planks on the river, communicated it to the others lounging about in front of the house. Glenbenrough, observing a slight stir amongst them, and missing Macrae from the room at the same moment, went out; the first word uttered by the men was sufficient, and with a strong epithet on their apathy, he darted up the bank, and ran in the same direction as Macrae, with the swiftness of a lad of sixteen. Had he at that moment seen Harold in the death struggle, he would have plunged in to his assistance at the risk of his own life: unselfish, generous even to that, was the noble nature of Glenbenrough.

Some foreboding instinct led Marchmoram to sally out soon after, and, asking no questions, he quickly followed after Glenbenrough; then the others all came out and stood in chill un-

certainty at the door: a dreadful, undefined feeling weighed upon all; but it was scarcely realised, ere it was dissipated by the appearance of Harold descending towards them.

There was but one left within the house: one whose ear had been eagerly listening to every sound without, ever since they entered, watching for the approaching step of the missing one, and longing for the bright smile that was to flood the room with light to her; and when the perturbed movement came, succeeded by a portentous silence, and all went out after Glenbenrough and Marchmoram, a sickening terror struck cold on Norah, and sinking on her seat, she sat shuddering, with clenched hands, alone. In another moment she heard his voice, and knew that he was safe; but she still sat, overcome with the revulsion of feeling: she could not rise and go out to join the welcome. It was a few moments ere the usual strength of her self-control returned; and then, when it did, she went out, and the cordial voice and smile with which she greeted Harold,

betrayed not that she had a deeper interest in him—that she felt a different pride in him from that of others.

As old Macrae poured forth his praises of the spirit, courage, and *sang froid* with which Harold had faced and conquered the peril, Esmé whispered to Norah, “It was not as the stoic;” and Norah knew that was true.

Harold had wound his handkerchief round his hand, his fingers having got lacerated in grasping the rock; and as they were entering for lunch, at last, he said that he really was fit for nothing but fishing now: he certainly should not be able to draw a trigger again that season on the Dual Ghu.

Champagne took the place of spruce beer at the lunch; but while it and the merriment were going merrily round, Norah suddenly sank back in her chair: she half fainted, and her cheek paled to a deathly white. They said the heat of the fire had been too much for her: her father and Esmé drew her into the fresh air, and Esmé stayed by her until

she recovered and resumed her place in the social cheeriness. But that night poor Norah's dreams were sadly disturbed: visions of a drowning man, in spectre-like shapes of horror, ever and anon affrighted her soul.

Old Macrae sat at the head of his table during the feast, and as he urged his guests, by precept and example, to pledge more frequently in the smuggled whisky, he proudly reminded the laird of a feast given once at Strathshielie, where, by every man's plate stood a bottle of pure Bordeaux.

"That's fit for youngest sons, my Leddy Mac Neil," said I; "but gie me a bottle o' whisky, and, glass by glass and stoup for stoup, I'll drink it fair to their claret! And mind ye yon night returning hame, laird, when young Davidson o' Kinbrae fell senseless off his horse, and I, Kenneth Macrae, sober on nigh as much whisky as he had drunk of claret, carried him seven miles on my back."

The Englishmen could not be induced to taste the smoked deer ham; though that was

a great mistake on their part, at which Ishbel laughed, and saucily said to Marchmoram,

"I could almost wish that those hampers of luxuries you sent from Dreumah had been lost on the way, and then your blank faces would have proved how very much more they were sent for your own sakes than for ours! You can't relish our fare."

"Some of its peculiarities I certainly don't: as for others, *vide* these wrecks of grouse and kippered salmon, Miss Ishbel! But there is no doubt," Marchmoram retaliated, "*that* was what prevented the Romans from attempting the subjugation of the North. Don't think it was dread of your prowess; it was merely dread of famine: they knew they could get nothing to eat on their march."

"Horrid epicures!" exclaimed Ishbel.

"Apropos to Rome," interrupted Glenbenrough. "I think we should have some Gaelic Olympic games here this evening. What would you say to our giving the lads some prizes

for feats of jumping, running, tossing the caber,\* etc.?"

The proposition was popular with all, and to none more than the old host, who hastily went out and speedily called a gathering. A long flat of turf by the margin of the river was the spot selected; and when the whole party arrived there, they found about forty men and lads already collected; all keen for rivalry and display.

It was a curious wild scene when the games began. The shades of evening were already lengthening on the hills and darkening the water, and the echoes rang with the shrill yells and shouts of the competitors,—gaunt kilted men wielding the caber with naked arms, their red uncombed hair streaming back on the wind as they ran races or made flying leaps. At last they took to the river, and swam with mad eagerness, in rivalry, from side to side. A small cask of whisky was

\* A young fir-tree.



then broached, and Macrae dispensed it unlimitedly; but it seemed as if early habit and the severe exercise prevented its having any bad effect, outwardly at least.

It was now time to return, but not until further hospitality had been offered and accepted. Ruddy-faced maidens appeared with trays of good hot tea, richest cream, and oat cakes and butter, of which the party partook in the open air; and then the huge green bottle and glass were produced, and the whole party tasted the "Deoch an doruis,"\* preparatory to starting. The moon was bright, and they all agreed to walk: old Macrae took the lead, as he was to convoy them (*selon le regle*) part of the way.

Esmé had had no conversation with Marchmoram all day. He had been in one of his forbidding moods; excited for the time whilst fishing for and slaying the pike, but with no geniality or animal spirits in him. He was

\* The stirrup cup.

often enough thus grave, or absent; and none of his friends ever seemed to wish to interfere with the former mood, or disturb the latter. They all knew he was a man of busy inner life—a worker of schemes—and would only relax as it suited him.

Esmé followed in the rear, between Normal and Ishbel. They had not gone far when Auber joined them, and told Ishbel that old Macrae was relating a ghost story in the front. Ishbel instantly ran forward, and, as Auber smiled, Normal cast a bitter look at him and Esmé, and went after Ishbel: Esmé saw it. Auber lowered his voice for conversation.

“Do not walk so fast, Esmé, and I will tell you a story too.”

“Look, Mr. Auber, Mr. Marchmoram is all alone; we ought to join him.”

Auber bit his lip as the next step brought her to his friend's side. Marchmoram looked up as they joined him, then looked down again, and walked on without a word. Auber began to talk of Harold's adventure.

"By-the-bye, we must be near the spot; he shall point it out to me: the moonlight shining on the slippery rock will bring the nightmare to him, I suspect!" and he moved on, leaving Esmé alone with Marchmoram. This ease or indifference he knew ought to pique her.

"Your thoughts are very far away, Mr. Marchmoram," Esmé said at last, after they had proceeded some way in silence.

"Yes, Esmé," he replied, looking down kindly upon her, but with a contraction on his brow, and deep thought in his eyes; "I was thinking it was time for me to put out to sea."

"Do you mean to go away?" she asked, as with parted lips she gazed upon his face: her's looked very pale in the moonlight.

"I must go into Parliament, Esmé, and do the work I was born for. This has been ever before me: I have delayed until I had attained sufficient maturity to guarantee success. I am strong enough now for the battle, and must be up and doing."

"Rest a little while longer, Mr. March-

moram;" and poor Esmé spoke in a more pleading tone than she was aware of. "When once you enter, it will be long ere you pause again: a long life is before you. Your resolution will not lose, though you delay it."

"Ah! Esmé, you should not speak in this way. Rather urge me on with these words—they might come from you:—

'O Townshend, could'st thou linger  
Where scarce a ripple played,  
Around the lily's glossy stem,  
Beneath the willow's shade;  
And did that mighty chorus  
Allure thy bark in vain,  
The laughter of the dancing waves,  
The music of the main?"

"That stirring up of ambition is so beautifully worded," said Esmé, "that were I repeating it, I am afraid that, in dreaming over the rhythm, I might sometimes let opportunity slip."

"No such softness of sentiment with me, Esmé. 'The dancing waves' and 'the music

of the main,' are images too stirring for that. I seize upon their spirit, and stay not to look at the beauty of their aspect. The wide ocean invites, and out upon it my bark must be launched: I dare stay no longer by the rippling streams of the lily." He spoke this hurriedly; but at the last words a gleam of tenderness beamed on Esmé's pale face.

She looked up, with a slight curve of the lip, and a calm proud smile, and answered slowly and distinctly, without a tremble in her voice,

"No, you should not. If you feel thus ready, and have work before you, you should go out and begin it. Life will *not* be long enough for you."

They were both silent for a time. Marchmoram then said,

"Esmé, though my mind was intended for, and is dedicated to, material practical work, still I have some imagination in me, else I could not appreciate you."

"And, Mr. Marchmoram, I may say I under-

stand you ; for though you may think me a dreamer, still I feel I could throw that mood off, and enter heartily into the stirring realities of life."

"Therefore, Esmé, there is not a little mutual sympathy between us ; in fact, we are very nearly counterparts : I being a man, though, and the *materialism* certainly stronger—for your's, though it may be latent, has not been roused yet : you would always be the weaker. In life I should always be the stronger."

Esmé did not reply ; and they again moved on in silence. When Marchmoram next spoke, his tone was wholly different : he was on another subject.

"What dark shadows the mountains cast to night ! Esmé, you are superstitious, are you not ?"

"I don't know : that is a term of very wide meaning. I should not like to answer at once."

"Do you believe in guardian angels ?"

"I can't say that I have dwelt much on

them: perhaps mine has been too often frightened away," Esmé replied, with a smile half sad, half arch; and then she said, in a grave voice, "but I think I must believe in them, for I do thoroughly in evil angels."

"How? this is strange! So you have given more thought to the evil than the good?"

"Not strange, Mr. Marchmoram; we ought to pay more heed to the evil, for it is with it we have most to do. Short is the hour given, and strenuous must be the fight. Oh! Mr. Marchmoram, the moment that we see ourselves conquerors, we need care to stay no longer in this world!"

Marchmoram answered earnestly, but absently, "Esmé, these two great agencies make up the mystery of our life. You say the evil has the advantage: I believe it has the best of it in this world."

"But it is not the stronger," she replied, in a low tone; "no; if it were, we would have no chance at all. It is strongest, as being the first principle of our nature; but as soon as

we are fit to feel it—in our childhood, God sends his antagonistic weapon, conscience ; and with it we may conquer evil and cherish the good.”

“ You believe in evil angels ? ” Marchmoram said, after a pause ; “ how do you think they work ? do you embody them ? ”

“ No,” Esmé replied ; “ but I believe evil spirits get into some hearts, and seduce by them.”

“ Your ideas of evil are wholly theoretical : don’t you think so ? ” Marchmoram rejoined, looking earnestly, and with a peculiar smile, upon her. “ Now mine may, perhaps, be founded on a little more experience of reality. Tell me how you think evil would work in a heart it had got into ? ”

“ It would first make a prey of the mind sheltering it, and then, through that mind, instil iniquity into another. Evil sentiments whispered by one heart to another would be just the promptings of an evil spirit enthroned in the heart that uttered them.”

Marchmoram suddenly stopped, and taking



Esmé's hand, drew her back. There was an excited look about him; he was impatient for the sequel of the conversation.

"Look!" he said, pointing to the river flowing still and solemnly by their path; "let us turn from metaphysics to nature. Did you ever see anything more beautiful on God's earth? See the water, tremulous in the moonbeams, flowing in a tide of molten silver; and look how vividly the moonlight brings out the colouring of the grassy banks, and the grey and purple hills. There is a little loch not far from this, where water lilies grow: do you know it, Esmé? It would look exquisite on a night like this."

"I know it," she replied, and a deep blush spread over her face, which had been pale as marble before. "Mr. Auber brought me there."

"Ah!" exclaimed Marchmoram, absently; and then, with a lowered tone, "you think Auber very agreeable?"

"Yes; very."

"You must do so: no man is more undeniably thought so: no man has been more fortunate, more to be envied than myself, in having for so many years enjoyed such society as his."

"You are great friends, Mr. Marchmoram," Esme said in a low voice.

"Yes, great, Esmé." And then he spoke in deep and earnest tones, but with a nervous twitch of the severe thin lip, and with eyes which moved restlessly, but never once sought her's, as they slowly walked on.

"His father and mother died years ago, and he was left an only son. I was an only son, too, but my father died not a year ago. Auber's intellect acquired strength early, and he reached his manhood young; his enjoyment of life has long been utterly unchecked by aught save the conscience you spoke of, Esmé. Early his own master, he indulged freely the gratification of his impulses: a wayward fancy urged him on, and his faculties and tastes had full scope for exercise. But I, Esmé, only now intend

to begin life, the vitality of which is already almost dying out with Auber ; and in my career I will enjoy what he now can never reach ! By long concentration I have gained in depth what he has wasted in speed : and, as in act, so in feeling, Esmé."

Here Marchmoram turned, and gave her one lightning glance from his deep dark eyes, which thrilled throughout her frame.

"My love would now be better worth than his," he continued. "My father's death removes the barrier from the course I have long panted to run : my affection for him kept me back from the only opposition I ever felt to his plans for me. Nature took a curious turn when she gave me the physical characteristics of a long line of ancestors, who were as strongly marked by an identity of political ideas, yet gave the germ of a principle wholly contrary ; for even in my boyish days I had an instinct that I was to be the reverse of my race, in this respect. You know my conservatism, Esmé ? If I succeed in working out my

theories, there will be more to remark than the mere change in political opinions of an ancient family."

He was silent for a few moments, then continued,

"But of my friend Auber, whom all know to be fascinating,—for there are no secrets of either of our lives unknown from the other—don't you think that he, with his early freedom of choice, should be well fitted to love, or to have loved, Esmé?" Scarcely pausing to note her silence, he proceeded, his voice becoming intense with inward excitement, and he controlled its tone that it might reach no further than her to whom he spoke. "But he does not love: he never has loved; he will not love truly. Think not I betray him, Esmé: I have seen him seek for love before. I have seen him elicit it from others as young and fair as you, and I have left it to themselves to discover, and to rue it. But it shall not be so now. Esmé, beware of the evil angel! I saw him at the lily loch——"

and here Marchmoram grasped the hand which Esmé had put before her face, and the keen fire of his eyes almost blazed upon her as he spoke.

"Will you wash away that kiss with tears? Will you? tell me! I must know—I have a right to know."

He clutched her hand with the strength of a vice, as Esmé tried to free it, and his voice was deep and harsh; but a change came over him, and he threw her hand from him with a rough tenderness, as she sobbed forth with passionate tremulousness,

"Mr. Marchmoram, speak not so to me! Oh, you have no mercy: you know not my heart."

He whispered, "Let me know it, Esmé," and then strode on to join the others.

They were but a few yards from the encampment.

## CHAPTER V.

## ADVENTURES AND LEAVE-TAKING.

—————Excisemen in a bustle,  
Seizin' a stell,  
Triumphant crushin't like a mussel  
Or lampet shell.  
BURNS.

"Douglas has laid bye his bassenet.  
The King his hawk, and gude grey hounde,  
And Harry Maxwell's ta'en his bent,  
An' it's hey, an' it's hey for English ground."

FLORH returned from the Dual Ghu a day sooner than the rest of the party; and, after executing some commissions at Glenbenrough on which Norah had purposely despatched her,

she proceeded to her own cottage. Neither Huistan nor Ewen were within doors; but she knew one or other must be at home, for the embers of a turf fire burnt on the hearth, and soon after her arrival they both made their appearance.

Huistan had been away for some days, and on foot nearly the whole time; having gone with his faithful collies, Conas and Frenchen, to distant hills in search of a missing score of sheep, which he and his dogs were now driving home before them; and his heart was cheered, when, from a distant height, he came in sight of the smoke issuing from his mother's cottage chimney. As Huistan, thankful in heart, though worn and wearied in limb, came plodding onwards, he had met with an adventure which so broadly touched his sense of the ludicrous, that, as he afterwards said, it sent him home quite "spirted up" again.

Stopping to look down on Lochandhu, a deep wild ravine opened, winding from the neighbouring hills, and through this came a distant

echo of a terrible yell upon Huistan's startled ear. The next moment he saw old Ian Mohr advancing at full speed, wildly rushing through the trees; he saw his broad blue bonnet off, his long white hair streaming in the breeze, and his plaid dragging after him on the ground. As he came nearer, Huistan saw water pouring from his clothes, elbows, and knees.

"Hout tout! hout tout! Halt ava, halt ava! what's this?" cried Huistan, as he ran forward to intercept Ian's mad career. But the old man brushed past him with irrestrainable impetus, and darted on a few paces beyond ere he stopped. Then, however, turning back, he with trembling grasp seized Huistan's hand; his wrinkled face was ash-coloured, and his old voice quaked with terror.

"Och, stop him! stop him!" he gasped in Gaelic; "he's after me, at last! I'm old—very old; and I never yet encountered him like this afore!"

"What? who, man?" Huistan exclaimed. "I thocht nae mortal thing could daunt ye!"



"Neither could it; but it's the de'il, man!" Ian replied, dropping his voice to a whisper, and glancing fearfully backwards.

"Lord be aboot us!" cried Huistan, and he staggered back for a moment against a tree.

"Aye, say that, say that! Pray ye, pray ye! keep him aff!" ejaculated old Ian, again taking a protecting grasp of Huistan. "He had me nigh by the shuther: his vera grip was on my throat! Oh! Huistan, ye'se such a guid lad, an' aye read your Bible on the hill: maybe I am wrang to tak the deer, when the Sassenachs pay their money for't. Not a grain wad I ever gie in to them; but noo, if they've got the de'il to tak care o' their goods, Lord, Lord! I can stand it no langer! If the de'il's to come into the purty stag, an' tak wing wi' the ptarmigan an' grouse, Lord! ae things cursed an' changed thegither."

"But hoo? but hoo?" exclaimed Huistan, with awakened interest.

"He caught me at the rinning stream. I was up in Glen Madhu early the morn. Ye

ken the Dreumah keeper is up in the laird's country if the noo; an' I heard there was a bonny herd last night in the glen, so I aff wi' my ain auld flint, and never did I mark an easier quarry. I had nae stalk ava; for I shot the bonniest stag o' the season, three hours syne, as he stooped to drink at the rowan spring. When I had left the eagles their share o' him there, I gat him lightened on my back; but still he was heavy as leid: I went crumpled to the ground under his weight: the burden was na canny——"

"Ye hae na shot ane the year afore, Ian," interrupted Huistan. "Maybe ye're ain increase o' age made that——"

"Na, na! Bide a wee!" said Ian, shivering. "When I dragged down to the river, I plunged in, the bonny legs fast round my neck. Half way through, the evil ane cam! He louped on me wi' a stound. I was gripped by the throat and dragged back in the water. The de'il gripped me, man, and rove the staig from my back. I gae a skriech, an' a loup, an' saw the

hoofs o' beast, an' o' de'il, plunge up a'thegither in the water. I wi' my ain strength cleared them baith, and got on to the dry land: then, man, man, I ran for my sowl!"

Huistan grasped something he had concealed in the folds of his plaid on his breast, and made a step for the ravine, as he said firmly,

"Come back wi' me, Ian: we maun see to this."

"No, dinna gae, dinna gae! I'll no gae wi' ye! I could na, an' I darena, bide here my lane without ye!" exclaimed Ian, clutching him vehemently.

"Weel, weel," Huistan muttered; and he hesitated also: a faint feeling of natural superstition made his strong step and willing heart almost quake; but the next moment he drew out his Bible from his plaid, and gave it into Ian's hand.

"Sit ye down wi' that, Ian, an' ye'se safe, though they come as legion. Haud it for a safeguard. I'm no feared, mysel', for de'il, or bodach, or bogle!" and he strode off,

as the old man sat him down, crouching in the heather.

Here was true courage, with its highest attributes; for poor Huistan, in his unselfish surrender of the Bible, parted with the armour he alone trusted in for himself: in entrusting the aged trembling sinner with it, he started, as he believed, quite undefended, and open to spiritual assault; which was the more terrible to him from his own strong religious belief.

The ravine, thickly wooded, wound down to the river edge; and, as Huistan emerged, his eye fell on a vaguely terrible object. Not ten paces from him, something moved in the water; it was black and hairy, and the points of what seemed long ears or horns, momentarily appeared and vanished. With a loud, wild ejaculation in Gaelic prayer, Huistan plunged boldly in. "Beir uainn! Beir uainn!"\* he cried, as he grappled with a bulky moving mass. A pair of glazed brown eyes turned upward in the

\* Away—away with thee!

water, as, with nervous grasp, Huistan clung on to Ian's fine, poached, slain deer!

The head and legs were fast caught amidst the dense strong branches of a knotted thorn: a withered tree that had stranded and long lain there beneath the deep rapid current. Unperceived by Ian, the horns of the deer had got entangled as the head hung down from the old man's back, when wading through the stream. Conas and Frenchen were soon busy at the work of release, and splashed, and barked in noisy glee in the water, as their master's loud honest laughter woke the echoes round. Huistan soon dragged out the stag, and laid him safe on the sunny bank, and then hurried back to Ian: his loud laughter travelled onward to Ian's astonished ear, its cheery sound in strange contrast to the old man's own yells of terror a short time previously.

It was sad, yet amusing, to see how quickly the ruling passion resumed its sway in Ian's breast the moment he thought it might with safety return. He became garrulous in grati-

tude to Huistan and in exculpation of himself, and absolutely abjured all the slight hints of repentance which fear had wrung from him a few moments before: indeed, he became triumphant in a confirmed belief of his impunity.

“Na, Na, lad!” he exclaimed, as he leant gloating over his rescued prey, putting his finger into the bullet-wound, and lovingly feeling the fat on the haunches, “I’ll no gie up my sport. I’ll no believe I’m wrang. They ne’er can hae rightsome right to the free beasts an’ birds o’ the hill. E’en the de’il himsel’, ye see noo, wad nae demean himsel’ to abet them! Ne’er a fear nor a dout (thanks to ye, Huistan, lad,) will e’er hinder Ian Mohr again!”

“Weel, Ian, weel,” Huistan replied, in a dissatisfied tone, “it’s no conscienceable, say what ye will; but ye’re ower auld to be argued now: syne ye hae shot this deer, be satisfied, and gae after nae more o’ them the year. Is it me tak a haunch? na, na! I’d

sooner hunger for three days, Ian! An' I'll tell ye what: ye ken it's the heid, an' no the venison itsel' so much, thae English sportsmen prize. Noo gie me a promise, ye'll cut aff the heid—see it's a royal ane—and lay it some dark night at the door of Dreumah Lodge. Since ye hae stown the stag, gie them the benefit o' the heid, whatever."

And Huistan, ere he left him, extracted this promise; which Ian afterwards honourably fulfilled. It was the only amends which Huistan's influence could attain, and the only satisfaction which he could apply to his own honest views on the subject.

When Huistan reached the cottage, he found his mother safely re-installed there, and employed in mashing the potatoes for dinner. Ewen also sat by the hearth. Huistan welcomed his mother warmly, as he hung up his plaid and his bonnet, and threw himself, wearied, down; but Florh did not appear to be in very equable temper: she answered his inquiries shortly, and glanced crossly at Ewen, who,

though silent now, had been talking and laughing the moment before Huistan's entrance.

The potatoes and herrings were steaming on the table, and Huistan had just asked for the blessing upon them, when Ewen again burst into a sulky laugh; his small eyes twinkled maliciously, and he rubbed his hands together.

"It's no the money they'll grudge," he muttered, as if absently: "it's no the money; but, oh! it's his high English pride! Oh! to think o' the Lowland gaugers gaeing hurrying into his hoose; to hae them handling an' rummaging in his very bedroom! the vera plate kists, wi' his English badge, a' turned upsides down; his papers a' tossed out! An' then the newspapers! It's no lang accounts o' their grand sport will noo appear, o' the game they hae shot; but the Procurator Fiscal's warrant for their defrauding o' the Queen! He'll be disgraced: he'll be disgraced in the public papers!"

Huistan looked up.

"What's this ye're sayin', Ewen?"



"What I canna approve mysel'," Florh replied shortly, answering for him. "That's too mean a revenge, to my thinking: I'm ashamed o' it, Ewen. May it never be traced to bairn o' mine! He has informed on the whisky lying at Dreumah."

Huistan's sun-burnt face almost visibly paled, and then flared into crimson again, as he stared at his brother with pained and startled looks.

"Ewen! an' ye my brither? Speak ye o' English disgrace in the papers? Nae, but think o' Hieland cunning and meanness! I'll gae daft: I'll gae daft! The laird's ain freends and tenants, too! What wad our ain high-minded laird think o' it? Let me oot, let me oot, till I stop them!"

Pushing aside his untasted dinner, Huistan sprang to his feet; Ewen jumped up, too, and, with knitted brow, stood before him.

"Mind ye're ain business, an' I'll mind mine," he said doggedly.

"Hinder me no!" cried Huistan, pulling down his bonnet from the nail. "I'll save

the name o' Mackenzie from disgrace." He threw Ewen to the side with one hand, and reached the door; but Florh rushed forward and intercepted him: she stood at her full height and spoke as with the authority of ancient despotic rule.

"Hear ye, hear ye!" she cried, "I desire ye na to go. I hae two sons; the ane has acted gainst my knowledge, but the other shall nae act against my desires! Wad ye gae an' turn informer, noo, against your brither?"

Huistan curled his lip proudly as he stood there, inflexible as his imperious mother; much like her in attitude of defiant pride, but with the might of right on his side.

"Trust to me no to do that," he said; "but go I shall, and he and ye shall yet thank me."

"I forbid ye!"

"Mither, I canna obey ye," Huistan replied, and, darting past her, he got outside and ran down the bank of the loch. Ewen, as he stood at the cottage door, sent a shrill laugh after him.

"Better to hae saved ye're breath for ye're dinner," he cried. "Ye're ower late, ye're ower late."

"It seems my rule o'er my bairns is drawing to an end," Florh said bitterly as she turned within. "Oh, Ewen, what wad my high-spirited, noble Normal think o' ye the day? Gin ever this comes to his ears he'd for ever cast ye out."

Huistan thought not of hunger or fatigue as he ran. When he reached the rocky barrier of Erickava, he stopped a moment to order back his dogs, who, ever faithful, had followed; and then he sped on. When he reached the bridge which spanned the Nightach, he again stopped. He was breathless, and took a draught of water; then proceeded more leisurely, but at a rapid walk, by the margin of the river. As he went stumbling on over the stony, heathery track, his eyes sought restlessly the horizon far and near; at last, with an exclamation of joy, he saw, not a hundred paces before him, but with the breadth of the river

between, that which he had so eagerly looked for.

Advancing through the birches came a body of strong-looking, well-dressed men; there might be seven or eight; they were dressed in dark blue uniform, and Huistan, from where he stood, could see the glittering of steel weapons, pistols, and cutlasses in their belts. This was no secret expedition of crafty espionage, when the "gaugers" go separately and in subtle disguise to entrap unwary possessors of smuggled stores, or to prowl in search of a suspected still; but they were going boldly, on legitimate information, with the certainty of capture and of a large share of the imposed fine: which also, under the circumstances, was not likely to be a mitigated one.

The gaugers walked rapidly, but quite steadily: they knew very well that their approach was quite unsuspected, and that they were not in the least likely to meet with any one who could turn to give timely warning. However, they had not pursued their course

by the river for any great distance, when one of the number looking back, observed Huistan keeping pretty equal pace on the opposite side. The scrutiny that instantly followed was not favourable to the shepherd. He looked tired and heated: that might be natural enough; but where was his plaid? where the colly dogs? There was an air of hurry and excitement about him, and his approach had been rapid and silent. The gaugers moved on, Huistan keeping neck and neck: but this would not do; he must gain advantage, or all would soon be lost. The Lodge lay but about two miles further on.

He hailed the formidable party, and blithely asked them whence they were bound.

"Ye had better come on with us and see," gruffly replied the thick-set, weather-beaten leader, his voice growling across the water like distant thunder.

"Na, na," Huistan replied, with a laugh (but inwardly saying, "God forgive me") "my walk lies na much farther, lads. Are ye gaeing

up yon steep brae?" pointing to one of the hills in advance.

"It's not likely we are," again growled the leader, glancing at Huistan askance.

"Weel, if no, I am; an' gin ye meet any o' my ewies on your side the water, I'd thank ye kindly to gie them a drive ower to me: gude day to ye, sirs."

And whistling carelessly, he shortly afterwards began the ascent of a hill, which led down in a totally different direction. He went climbing up until a gully in the rocks hid him from their view; then lying down amongst the brackens, he watched them proceed a considerable way, and gave wild yells while they were still in hearing, as if he were shouting after missing dogs or sheep.

It was not half-an-hour later that Messrs. Greaves and Thorold, the respective valets of Marchmoram and Auber, were seated luxuriously on a form drawn forth in front of the lodge for their benefit, enjoying the sunny afternoon with tankards of frothing ale and

gossip, and mutually congratulating each other on their happy escape from the late hardships of the Dual Ghu; they having been sent home a few days in advance of their masters. Thorold was just declaring he felt that "an entire dislocation of his system" had taken place, when his words seemed likely to be cruelly verified; for, as with the rush of an earthquake, he and Greaves, the seat, tankards, ale and all, were dashed to the ground; and ere he could gasp for mercy or shriek for help, a great strong-fisted Highlander held him struggling at his feet. Like a thunder-cloud Huistan had burst upon them: dashing round the sharp angle of the wall, the great black-browed panting shepherd had violently and inadvertently come in contact with the calm arrangement of their *tête-à-tête*.

"Ne'er mind a bit scart on ye're spindle shanks, man," he gasped, as Thorold with a howl put his hand on his leg; "but tell me quick, are ye Mr. Marchmoram's heid flunkey? butler they ca' it: quick, quick, then; oot wi' the keys o' ye're wine cellar."

"Murder! murder! robbery!" shouted Thorold, writhing in the shepherd's brawny grasp.

"Ye're daft, ye cowardly loon!" cried Huistan, shaking him furiously. "Oh, man, search his pockets for the keys!" he exclaimed in an agony of impatience to Greaves; who, more collected, had risen to his feet. "Here I hae rin nigh nine mile to save ye're master's names an' siller, an' a' will be lost unless ye mak speed: ye hae smuggled whisky in the cellar. Hiest ye! hiest ye! oot wi' it! I'll rin an' I'll dash it into Loch Nightach afore their faces." Relinquishing Thorold, he seized upon Greaves' arm and dragged him into the Lodge. Almost mechanically, but, under Huistan's excited influence, moving rapidly, Greaves drew out a key and hobbled to the cellar.

"The cask is much too heavy," he exclaimed with nervous hurried trepidation.

"Na fear, na fear!" shouted Huistan, as, with the strength of three men, he hoisted it upon his back and, balancing himself, set forward at a run. "There, they are coming, an'



I daresay they'll cut ye're throat!" he cried, as he passed Thorold, propped against the wall.

At the same moment the sight of approaching armed men, and his utter confusion as to what had passed, save the violence of the assault and the present horror of Huistan's threat, quite overcame Thorold's shallow brain: but one idea presented itself to him—the massacre of Glencoe! Driven frantic with fear, he rushed into the Lodge; where, some hours later, he was discovered by the chambermaid, in an almost insensible state, buried beneath the mattress of his bed.

Greaves followed Huistan. The excisemen were in sight, on the ridge of the nearest hill, and Huistan had reached the dog-kennel.

"We're safe! we're safe!" he exclaimed in ecstasy. "It's off the premises: they canna noo prove whar it came from. But I'll gie them some trouble to regain the stuff itsel': I'll tempt them yet, a wee," and he staggered on towards the loch.

The universal yell that now broke from the

hill and came wildly echoing down, might well reach Thorold's muffled ears where he lay, and paralyse him with terror. With shouts of rage, the baffled excisemen charged headlong down.

"That cursed cheating shepherd! A thousand deaths on his o'er-matching speed and cunning! A hundred pounds went scattering with his steps upon the wind!" Never had they been more boldly and cleverly defeated, outwitted, and ridiculed.

As they came headlong, hopelessly on, some tripped up and toppled over the others; the leader's voice, urging forward with its loudest growl, was stifled beneath the hasty feet of his comrades; and by the time they had, breathless and blown, reached the water's edge, Huistan had already thrown the prize into one of the deepest pools in the loch.

Like ravening wolves (but muzzled), the gaugers surrounded him: save by the scourge of tongue, they were powerless to touch or harm him. There was no proof by which they could show that the cask he had carried contained

smuggled whisky; and even though it could now be upraised from its watery bed, the loch must be drained ere they could swear that it, and no other, had been thrown in: and as for the English proprietor, he was safe from the moment that Huistan had borne it across the threshold of his dwelling.

“Hands off! hands off! honest men!” Huistan exclaimed, as they swarmed like wasps around him. “In ye’re trade, ye maun just tak’ things as ye find them! An’ I canna on my conscience say, that I wish ye better luck next time. Let’s part, noo; an’ baith hae a peaceable rest, after our lang an’ weary travel.”

Huistan went back with Greaves, and enjoyed a long deep draught of English ale; but, in spite of all the latter’s urgent entreaties, he refused to give up his name. The moment his work was done, and the cask safe in Loch Nightach, he had drawn his Kilmarnock bonnet over his brow; and, save the black-bearded lower part, there was, indeed, very little of his face to be seen.

“Never mind, never mind, my guid friend, he said, “I’m no in your part o’ the country at a’; an’ it’s no like that ye’ll ever see Hu——, me again. It was jist a bit spree to me: an’ nae more weight nor trouble than carrying a muckle ram on my back to the wool washing.”

“But my master will never be satisfied with this,” Greaves replied, disconcertedly. “He will want to reward you handsomely: he will wish to understand the whole story; and will require to know who gave the information. He is a gentleman who must reach to the bottom of everything.”

“Weel, weel!” Huistan exclaimed excitedly. “Listen to me, Mr. Butler! Ye speak o’ a reward. Tell your master the only reward Hu——, I will tak’, is this; that, for the sake o’ the country’s guid name, he will ne’er inquire a word more about the matter. He never will discover who informed; for there’s no ane in this world, forbye mysel’, perhaps, an’ the gaugers, that kens it; an’ they ne’er

gie up : an' to avoid scandal on any o' my countrymen, I beg this may be so. Tell him, if he thinks I hae done any service worthy o' reward at a', this is the only reward I'll tak'. Nae harm, ava, has been done him ; an' it was to stave it aff him (for I hated it to come meanly on him, frae, maybe, a Hieland freend,) that I risked my neck an' my liberty the day ; an' syne he got ane Hielandman wha did the guid to him, it canna be ower muckle to ask him, for that sake, to forgie the ither Hielandman wha had intended him the harm. Tell him I trust to his honour for this : it's my reward."

Without waiting for further reply, but nodding decisively to Greaves, Huistan turned on his heel ; and he reached Lochandhu by a long and circuitous route, which it would have been very difficult for any following spy to have traced.

Mr. Marchmoram, on his return, was informed by Greaves of the past anonymous deed of daring friendship ; and whether he attempted

and failed to discover either the friend or the foe, or whether he took no steps—perhaps inwardly agreeing to scrupulously give the unknown Highlander his stipulated reward of silence—was never known; for subsequent circumstances took poor Huistan far from the range of his regard.

Three more days passed at the Dual Ghu which were wholly devoted to sport. Harold's injured hand being disabled for a gun, he fished every day with Norah and Ishbel; while Esmé sat on the rocks to look on. Harold and Norah seemed likewise oft to take a dreamy repose on the sunny banks of the river, for they often sat down. The other gentlemen shot; and the game book, on the 30th of September, showed a fair head of deer, grouse, and mountain hares—the latter game shot, not from sport, but from duty: and a week of cloudless weather.

And now the days of Dual Ghu were over; the tents were to be struck, the ponies saddled, the turf fires extinguished, and "Onward!" was the word.

The party returned by a different route from that by which they came. They went direct through the chains of mountains, which formed double and treble amphitheatres around the scene, and were soon in a labyrinth of hill, bog, and water ; which, to a party left there without guides, would have proved nigh inextricable.

In single file, and in zig-zag course, the riders proceeded ; the ponies often clambering along the edges of precipices, with gulfs of morass beside and beneath. The shepherd guides proceeded in advance, armed with long sticks, which they thrust every now and then into the treacherous moss ; and, with shrill cries in Gaelic, forbade or encouraged to advance, as they found the ground was safe or not.

The ponies went along with equal sagacity : where the path was hard and rocky they scrambled in gay scampering style, tossing their uncombed manes, and neighing to the echoing hills ; but the moment their hoofs sank into the soft parts, they paced with slow and canny movement, sniffing uneasily, with low bent head,

the peaty surface before them. And so the party went on, trusting to the sagacity of the shepherd guides; for no egress from the encircling hills, no track across the morass, was visible.

Solemn, vast, and grand, rose the heights of those grey old mountains. Not a blade of grass, not a leaf was to be seen; scarce even the herbage of heather: nought but the grey and black of the frowning rocks; or brown tracts of moss, and deep haunted-looking tarns, where the eagles stooped to drink. The solitude was awful, savagely sublime, and overpowering in its sense of loneliness and desolation.

No tongue could express the effect—the delightful feeling of relief—when, suddenly and quite unexpectedly, after hours of tedious riding, they emerged, through a huge grey rocky ravine, upon a full view of Glenbenrough spreading far beneath. They were yet miles off; but the whole downward way lay exquisitely green in beauty: the natural woods spreading in clumps of various trees, from



birch to ash, and the ground strewn with the feathery birch, scented bog myrtle, and heather in all its different blooms of purple. The very hills now assumed an altered aspect, being covered with glorious beauty as well as grandeur; their sides gemmed with sparkling torrents that relieved the varied shades of light and colour: the redness of the Roua Pass was clearly distinguishable, as the sun made its ruddy hue glow with light.

It was on Saturday evening they reached Glenbenrough, and it was arranged that the gentlemen should remain there, and return to Dreumah on Monday.

Sunday was a day of delightful rest; and as the girls were a little fatigued by the long ride home, their father absolved them from the customary walk to church: they had prayers instead, in the garden on the river bank. Ishbel proposed that every one should learn a short paraphrase:\* they did so; and each

\* Sacred verse used in Presbyterian churches.

repeated his or her task aloud, with gravity and decorum.

During those last few days at the Dual Ghu, Auber had repeatedly sought to have moments alone with Esmé; but always unsuccessfully: whether by design or from the result of circumstances did not appear. Esmé felt that Marchmoram's eye was upon her, and that he perceived the secret desire of Auber; for no outward manifestation of it was suffered to escape. But Marchmoram interfered not, either by word or look: indeed, Esmé even thought he sometimes seemed to abet Auber; for if he was the obstacle to a *tête-à-tête*, he instantly retired; and once or twice when she was thrown in his own way, he even turned abruptly from her. The gentlemen went to Dreumah on Monday, and Normal also returned to Arduashien that day.

October had advanced to its 9th day. A week had been passed at Glenbenrough—a quiet, resting week; and it was required, for stirring days were coming. On the morning of the 9th, Glenbenrough and Norah received two notes

by the post bag. The former was from Mr. Auber, and as follows:—

“DREUMAH LODGE, *October 8th.*

“MY DEAR SIR,

“Unforeseen business calling me very suddenly to London, I hope you will let me take Glenbenrough in my way, to wish you, and your fair circle, farewell; and, also, to thank you, in person, for the many pleasant hours which your hospitality has so kindly enabled me to pass. I propose being at Glenbenrough to-morrow, *en route* to Braemorin, whence I hope to get on by the mail.

“Believe me,

“Faithfully yours,

“EDWARD HERBERT AUBER.”

The second was from Strathshielie, and written by Lady Mac Neil.

“STRATHSHIELIE, *October 8th.*

“MY DEAR NORAH,

“I hope you have returned from the hills all well, and enjoyed yourselves there, and that the gentlemen had good sport. I write to say, we hope Glenbenrough will bring you all here as soon as possible (say Tuesday), to stay a fortnight. You will have got your invitation by this, I dare

say, to the grand ball at Couchfern; if not, it will soon arrive, and you must go from here.

"I have written to Normal Arduashien to join, and come with you here; but he, and half-a-dozen other young men, will have to sleep in the Grieve's house and at the lodge, for the house here is crammed. One of you girls will have to sleep in the bath room upstairs, and the other two in the room with Julia; but you will not mind this, I am sure. I hope you will have plenty of fun. Be sure and bring Donald, the piper.

"You will meet here Lady Lauriston, an old friend of your mother's, who is anxious to make your acquaintance. She is a delightful creature, but delicate. She and Sir Henry may go back with you to Glenbenrough, if she does not think the season too advanced. Miss Lindsay of Armsdale, married Sir Henry Lauriston, an Englishman, and has lived in England almost ever since. They arrived here almost as unexpectedly as the Sternbotham's; but very different indeed is the pleasure in their visit! Very likely either Marion or Julia may go back to England with Lady L.; so for this reason alone I hope you will come.

"If you have any spare game in your larder bring it with you. I assure you it is difficult to supply the scale of consumption here at present.

"I hope the Dreumah party will be invited to Couchfern: it will be a capital ball. I think we must find room for them here too; but where can they sleep?

"Do you think I could put one of them in Sir Alistair's

· dressing room? The Glenmardies are here, and the Seatonnes, etc.

"I wish you could bring some spare looking-glasses: say two large and three small.

"With love to your father, Esmé, and Ishbel.

"Ever, my dear girl,

"Your very affectionate,

"MARGARET F. MAC NEIL.

"P.S.—Don't forget Donald, the piper; and tell Esmé to bring her music."

There was very little discussion on Lady Mac Neil's invitation, for it had been expected some time; so Norah sat down to write her reply, accepting it, and fixing their going on Tuesday, four days hence. Glenbenrough made some comments on this sudden departure of Mr. Auber, regretting it as the first break in the Dreumah party; and then told Esmé to go and order a room to be prepared, saying he must insist upon Auber sleeping there that night, as he could get to Braemorin in plenty of time for the mail, by starting early next morning.

Norah, after one glance at Esmé, and seeing her look quite composed, though pale, proceeded

with her writing. Esmé left the room, and did as she had been desired; she then went to the garden, pulled some autumn flowers and scarlet berries, and arranged a bouquet, which she put on the toilet table of Auber's room: she saw that it looked all tidy and comfortable, and again went out; climbed up the Roua Pass and sat down. An hour later, she saw Auber and Harold on the bridge, driving from Dreumah, the luggage piled on the dog cart, and the valet sitting beside it. They drove up to the house, and Glenbenrough came out to welcome them.

Esmé slid behind a rock and sat motionless; the rim of her hat only was visible, and it so blended in the covert of yellow fading ferns, that at that distance she was quite indistinguishable. She saw Norah and Ishbel and the two gentlemen, by-and-bye, appear at the hall door; they wandered through the garden and went down to the river bank; and as Esmé looked down from her eyrie, a sunshiny smile lightened her eye, as it caught the radiance on Norah's

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happy face: Norah's mind was in a happy balance. A sigh escaped Esmé, as she saw Auber's dark eye seeking hither and thither, and felt he was unaware, and that she was (as she wished) unseen.

She did not meet Auber until a few moments before dinner in the drawing-room. The dinner was a merry one as usual; and, in so small a party, conversation was familiar and general. Auber repeatedly lamented the hardship of his sudden call to London; but it was on business, to which the miserable law commanded his presence and attention. He could not go with the bad grace of a school-boy, whose holidays had been cut short; and yet he felt much the same as the school-boy might. Did he dare, he would even forfeit much of the hoped-for gain, and pay a large price for the pleasure of a longer continuance in the Highlands; but this law-suit in which he was engaged, and which was connected with his property, was on too grand and ancient a scale to bear any such compromise. Go he must: so he said.

When they entered the 'drawing-room after dinner, Norah sat down to the piano; and Esmé took a book and went to her own room; but she did not read: with restless foot she paced up and down, her hand twisted through her long waving hair—her usual habit when giving herself up, as now, to the dangerous uncontrol of her fast-flitting fancies. After a time, she heard Ishbel's voice calling her name, and then she thought she heard steps on the gravel: they had all gone out to enjoy the calm twilight.

She entered the drawing-room, which seemed empty, and ran to the open window, and looked out to see if they were in sight; a step on the carpet made her turn her head, and her eyes met the gaze of Auber: he might have seen the beating of her bosom beneath the white muslin folds, and the quiver of her lip, as she found herself alone with him.

There was a mutual silence for a moment or two, and then Auber, drawing close to her, asked,



"Where were you to-day when I arrived? and all that time before dinner?"

"On the Roua Pass, Mr. Auber," was Esmé's reply; a nervous blush passing over her face.

"And you knew I was here—and that it was for the last time! Esmé, don't avoid me. Listen! Esmé: such intercourse as ours has been, must stamp its own character on your mind, and *will* have place in your memory; and, unless you hear me fully to-night, that memory will be sadly restless. To say that you are the dearest, most loveable little creature I ever knew—that you have entwined around a deep-worn heart a memory of yourself which I dare not disentangle, is not enough to express what I feel. You are mine, Esmé! In the desire of love, you are mine. Esmé, I will return next year; I trust that you will not forget me. You *will not* forget me? Give me a tress of your hair as a binding tie: it will be a charm; for its golden light will shine upon past hours, and throw brightness

on the future. Now let me cut it off: and promise you will not forget me!"

He drew her hand in his, as she leant back apart from him in the darkening recess of the window, and lifted up one of the waving curls that drooped on her shoulder. She put aside the hand which touched her hair, but allowed him with the other to retain her hand, which he had taken, while she replied,

"Mr. Auber, there is no reality in this. You do not feel thus. To you I have been but as the companion of a summer day; and now it is nearly over."

She spoke in a low, faltering voice; and her gaze, which fell softly but steadily upon his face, was sadly mournful in expression.

Auber saw no deeper than the look. Her words startled him in their simple significance and truth: but then, this look of grief! It was for him. That look, associated with her words, changed their tenor, and he interpreted them to imply a doubting trembling love: he believed she loved him. That she must do so,

and would discover it (if she knew it not yet) after he had left, he had little doubted; but he knew it now, for he saw it. That low-breathed sigh, that regretful look, and the tearful eyes full of sympathy, told the practised eye of him who met it, that Esmé loved.

She did: but *he* knew not whom.

Could he have but seen a little deeper, he would have discovered that her words expressed her discernment of the transitoriness of his feeling, and that she had thus saved herself from bartering her soul for nought: he would have discovered that the shadowy look of grief was distinct from them, and associated with another, whose name even then hung silently on her lips—to another who never had spoken of love as Auber had done, but who yet had won it from her.

Auber threw a passionate tenderness into his voice, as he again spoke. He was not altogether deceitful; for he was awakened to as strong an interest in this young girl as his nature could feel: but his love was not truth-

ful,—it was but a soft sentimental fondness. Could it be otherwise? Was not all generous and impassioned love extinguished in him?

No romance of autumn could enkindle the flaming ardour of youth, nor even revive the smouldering embers of devoted affection. What he now did, bore the stamp of guilt; in that he sought to gain her affections in utter selfishness: demanding a pledge of her without giving her any. If it suited him he would prize her love above all treasure, and cherish it night and day; but if he found his liking fail, he would consign her to oblivion without a pang of pity or remorse.

“Esmé, I love you! I take your memory with me, and I leave you my heart. Give me a binding tress of your hair,” pleaded Auber.

Again she replied with strange distinctness; but the expression of her saddened face still belied the truth of her words to him.

“No, Mr. Auber, I cannot give you a lock of my hair. You do not leave your heart with me. But you may sometimes think of

me; and that I will remember you, you must well know."

"We do not part thus," he had just time to whisper, as Ishbel came bounding up the stairs, followed by the rest of the party: they had all returned in raptures from a beautiful view of a lunar rainbow which had spanned the hills.

During the evening there were rather frequent inquiries on Harold's part as to the exact date of their visit to Strathshielie, and the expected ball at Couchfern; always followed by a rather depressed expression of his countenance, which, however, cleared up as Ishbel remarked,

"You are sure to be asked too, Mr. Harold; and then you will come to Strathshielie."

"Oh! but they don't know us at Couchfern."

"But they know *of* you: that is enough in the Highlands."

Then Harold would give a satisfied smile, and Ishbel a skip of delight. Glenbenrough

invited Harold to remain all night, in order to try the trout in the river next day; to which he agreed.

The whole party were up early next morning to bid adieu to Mr. Auber. It was a bright autumnal day: his luggage was being arranged upon the dog-cart; and they all stood at the hall door to see him start. He audibly asked Esmé to show him where the deer's-grass grew upon the Roua Pass, as he wished to take a parting piece to England with him: so she went to the hill with him; but the others did not follow.

"Esmé, you will not let me go without a tress of hair?"

"No, Mr. Auber; I cannot give it to you: I told you so before."

"Cruel girl! I do not believe it: you will send it to me. Esmé, I dare not write to you, for that would not be pleasing to your father; but you may write to me: write to me sometimes, Esmé; will you?" He bent anxiously towards her.

"No, Mr. Auber," Esmé replied, with grave downcast look; "I will not write to you."

"Well, think of me, then," he pleaded, with more eagerness of voice and look than she had ever seen in him before. Her coldness chafed and excited him; he would have had her more demonstrative of his influence. He wished she would let loose some of that passion which he well knew filled her nature, and which he would have fain have had lavished on himself.

"Esmé, promise me you will not marry until you see me again: not until next year."

One of her old smiles broke forth, and her face looked bright in its sunny youth, as she replied,

"I can promise that."

"Then I need say no more. I believe you will not forget me, for you *could* not, Esmé: even if you married, you would still remember me. Your inner life has mixed too intimately with mine; and the mystery of that sympathy is stronger than aught more earthly."

“You are right; I never shall forget you, Mr. Auber: but I have been kept from——” she hesitated, and the concluding words faltered inaudibly from her lips.

They were already amongst the birch-trees at the foot of the hill, returning, and but a few moments remained ere they should reach the others, who were still standing in front of the house. Auber spoke low and rapidly, detaining her by her hand.

“I will return: remember! You may sometimes see my name in the London papers. I may go abroad; but when I do, think of this, that whether in England or on the Continent,—amidst every phase of woman’s beauty—but one face will be before me: those deep blue eyes, and the face that I——loved at the water-lily loch.” He bent down, and suddenly impressing a burning kiss upon her cheek, was gone.

Esmé stood still amongst the birch-trees. She was not missed; for the moment that Auber drove off, Norah, Ishbel, and Mr. Harold de-



scended to the river banks, with their fishing-rods ; and Esmé went in the opposite direction. She threw herself upon the heather, beneath the shadow of the rocks, and reclined there in luxurious loneliness. She lay quiet beneath a glowing sun, and the echo of a tender voice murmured in her ear.

Yes, he had a power over her : he must have had ; he always would have. That volatile fancy, romance, or what you will—which was an idiosyncrasy of Esmé—must always have answered to the charm of Auber's thoughts, voice, and manner ; but there were depths in her nature which would have required the passion of a noble heart like Marchmoram's to stir : and she felt this was wanting in Auber.

Marchmoram was the true steel, which, with magnetic force, drew her irresistibly towards himself. Had he been absent, Auber might have led her on with his bewildering fascinations ; but as it was, her heart was safe from him : her reason opposed him, and her inclination was towards another.

CHAPTER XV.

THE BALL AT COUCHFERN—LADY IDA.

The ladies glided through the ha'  
Wi' footing swift and sure;  
But the Highland girl out did them a'  
When she stood upon the floor.

SCOTT.

I had leaned my head upon his breast,  
And yet I had wept—I knew not why.  
Oh! but my heart was ill at rest:  
I could not hold nor bid him stay.

HOGG.

THERE were gay doings at Strathshielie. The house was full as only a Highland house can be filled: guests were placed in every conceivable nook and cranny; sofas and arm-chairs

were converted into beds ; and Greaves, Marchmoram's valet, was asked to sleep on the top of the mangle in the laundry, which he indignantly refused to do.

A large circle, nearly all intimate friends, was assembled in the drawing-room before dinner, the day previous to the ball at Couchfern ; Harold, Marchmoram, and Sir Henry and Lady Lauriston, being the only strangers present : though the latter lady did not consider herself one. She was delighted to find herself again in old Scotland, after many years absence, and was ready to regard with the most lenient judgment all native peculiarities ; she also contrived to make her husband receive exactly the impression that she wished, and think all he saw or endured an enjoyable novelty.

Sir Henry Lauriston was a slight fair man, very gentlemanly and amiable, always ready, with a smile and short nervous stutter, to agree to everything his wife proposed. Harold, who was now talking to the lady, thought what an admirable wife a Scotchwoman made. Sir Henry

was in the happiest imaginable state of thralldom, being utterly unconscious of it, and his wife seeming to be so also. Lady Lauriston was a pretty woman, with a quiet kindly energy of manner; and though rather delicate naturally, yet, with that spirit of robust endurance which the Scotch possess, she succumbed to it as little as possible, troubling her husband with much fewer faints and hysterics than some of his fair countrywomen would have done. When the piper set up a preliminary screech on the bagpipe, ere commencing his customary musical parade around the dinner-table, Sir Henry would contract his brow in pain for a moment, and then relax into equanimity, as a bright glance from his wife told him he ought to think it "very nice." Indeed, she commanded his feelings in every way.

The other guests at Strathshielie were Sir Roderick and Lady Mackenzie of Glenmardie; Mr. and Mrs. Grant of Seatoune, and their only son; two rather antiquated Miss Mac Gregors, cousins of the family, very poor,

proud, and thin; Lady Fraser of Forran, a kind rich old widow; young Campbell of Breesah; Normal of Arduashien, and one or two supplementary young ladies and bachelors.

Marchmoram and Harold had arrived at Strathshielie to accompany the party next day to Couchfern, where Mr. and Mrs. Stuart Mac Leod were to give a ball, in honour of the return of their eldest son from a prolonged tour abroad. Young Couchfern was a popular man: strong and handsome, like a young eagle, his bold sporting exploits and noble spirit won the approbation of both men and women. In both him and Campbell of Breesah, the volatile element of the Celtic blood showed itself. They were men who enjoyed shooting all day, and dancing all night, as is the fashion in the Highlands; and relished a bottle of claret, or a nocturnal escapade, with equal zest: but Couchfern's joviality flashed openly in his bright dark eyes and wicked smile, while Breesah showed his in twinkling blue and covert expression. Young Seatoune, who was

at Strathshielie, partook more of Normal Mac Alistair's character: he was rather shy and reserved, but observing; and with a keen sense of the ludicrous. He noted, with quiet amusement, the droll contrast in appearance and character of Sir Roderick and Lady Glenmardie, who now joined the circle; and even of his own father and mother, as they entered a little later.

Lady Glenmardie was a vast, broad-shouldered, raw-boned woman, with implacable grey eyes, and a long thin mouth; she was attired in black velvet, and sparkled with jewels. She spoke in loud masculine accent; and in her younger days she had driven tandem over all the most dangerous roads in the Highlands, boasting of having used her whip on more horses—and men—than any other woman in Scotland. Indeed, whenever she dared, she still wielded the lash of her tongue as well as her thong; but as people always get repaid in kind, she often found herself thoroughly well flagellated by public opinion.

Sir Roderick, who, was almost concealed amidst the voluminous folds of his wife's gown, emerged a small, thin, wizened man, with a weak treble voice and trembling little chuckle. He was dressed in the shrunken uniform of a deputy-lieutenant (an appointment held more by her than by him), and he whispered to Lady Mac Neil that he was wearing a pair of his wife's boots, as she, in superintending the packing of his wardrobe, had forgotten that part of it. Lady Glenmardie overheard this confidential remark, and instantly commented on it in a tone that resounded through the room.

"Forget your boots, Sir Roderick! No; but you chose to wear out your others so extravagantly, that I told you I would not order another pair until the 6th of next month: recollect, the 6th of next month!" and she gave an appealing laugh of triumph to the company. Poor Sir Roderick endeavoured to respond by a feeble chuckle, which waxed fainter as she continued:

“And see you don’t dare to dance to-morrow night. I won’t have mine cracked, I assure you.”

“That would na be very likely,” Sir Roderick ventured to mutter, as he looked down upon a boot an inch longer than his foot.

Mr. and Mrs. Grant of Seatoune were a study for a week. He was a tall, stolid Highlander, with a big head of bushy red hair, and thick shaggy eyebrows; and his rusty-looking clothes hung loosely upon him. He was taciturn, slow, and cautious: assiduously devoted his attentions to his snuff-mull, from which he constantly refreshed himself with immense pinches of snuff. He never wasted time or money on intellectual pleasures, and would rather sit in mental calculation over a barrel of oats than listen to the sweetest melody under heaven. His wife was a surprising old lady; very short and stout, her fat little hands covered with rings, and her large coarse features surrounded by a profusion of tinsel ornaments and wonderful inventions of her own in



blonde and gaudy ribands. Her estimate of her personal attractions was second only to that of her intellectual. The former she considered dangerous to any man's peace; but by the latter she believed she could take him prisoner at will: for she prided herself prodigiously on her conversational powers. To waste this rare talent on Mr. Grant would, indeed, have been absurd: there was no appreciation in him; therefore, to procure it elsewhere became the grand object of her life: for this she fawned and flattered, courted and cringed, wherever she saw an opportunity of gratifying her vanity by displaying "her parts of speech;" and to gain an invitation, or a chance of an appreciating listener, all her small stock of worldly tact was exerted.

The first evening there was dancing of reels and Sir Roger de Coverley, to the alternate music of pipes and piano, with round games and *les jeux innocens*, until all hours in the morning. Next day there was a large *battue*;

and soon after dinner the ladies all retired to the duties of a ball-room toilette.

Six or seven carriages full left Strathshielie for the Couchfern ball. In the first drove Lady Mac Neil, Lady Lauriston, Julia and Norah; Sir Alastair sitting on the box, his evening costume concealed by a huge tartan plaid, and his good-humoured face buried in the folds, in order that the night air might not cause his appearance with too clarety a complexion. The second carriage conveyed Glenbenrough, Esmé, Ishbel, and Mr. Marchmoram.

It was a fine moonlight night, and the road lay through wild scenery all the way. Couchfern being built on a height, was approached by a long steep ascent; and, as they came in view of it, the danger of the route was fully revealed by the glare of blazing bonfires flaming on all the surrounding hills; a low parapet, in many places quite crumbled away, being the only protection against the frightful edge of the precipice along which the ascent lay.

Glenbenrough got out of the carriage here to walk up; but Marchmoram sat still with the girls. Ishbel gazed out of the window, and he spoke a few hurried words to Esmé in an under tone.

"Do you intend to be merry to-night, Esmé?"

"Yes, Mr. Marchmoram, I think so;" and she gave one of her arch smiles.

"Are you not fancying how another is spending this night? Would you not like to know?"

Esmé shook her head slightly, and turned her face away.

"I can tell you, partly. A pair of large dark eyes are seeking for his; but he would rather have the blue ones. He believes them tearful in his absence."

"Mr. Marchmoram," she replied, in a low firm voice, looking directly at him, "I care not to meet Mr. Auber again."

A flashing glance of his eye passed, and a momentary relaxation of his stern features revealed his delight; but with a decisive com-

pression of his lips he restrained any excitability.

In low, deep tones he whispered, "Esmé, my own!" then ceased abruptly; but her fair downcast face blushed and paled alternately beneath the searching gaze and burning light of those dilated orbs. At that moment Esme felt that she could have died for him.

The ball-room at Couchfern presented a striking scene: the old hall of the castellated edifice was decorated with every conceivable variety of Highland trophy; it was brilliantly lighted, and filled with a numerous assemblage of Highland gentry (some of whom had come from a distance of forty miles), displaying nearly every combination of tartan colours, in kilts and ladies' ribands. A guard of kilted men, holding flaming torches of pine wood, lighted the entrance from without.

Dancing had progressed for some time ere the arrival of the large Strathshielie party; but the moment they entered, the Miss Mac Neils were in instant request.

Never had Esmé looked more lovely: her style of beauty so uncommon in its brightness that the eye unconsciously continually singled her out. She was dressed (as were her sisters) in pure white silk, with bouquets of scarlet geranium, the green leaves and flowers intermingled in rich clusters with the waving gold of her hair. Marchmoram, who was seated, followed her movements as she danced, and his eyes were so rivetted on her that he well nigh attracted general observation; but in all that crowd of pre-occupied persons only Normal Mac Alistair noticed it.

The night had somewhat advanced ere Marchmoram again approached Esmé; and then, after dancing, he retained her hand and led her from the room. They walked about through the cooler ante-rooms, and sat and talked a long while in the entrance hall, which was, on this occasion, reserved for the company: a sense of intense happiness pervaded Esmé's being. Marchmoram's voice was subdued to the thrilling softness of Auber's, and a pas-

sionate fire burned in his deep clear eyes as he spoke. He did not utter words of love, but his looks spoke fervidly; and Esmé inwardly felt that but a slight barrier prevented the flood of passion from bursting forth. She knew how boundless his love could be, and there were depths within her heart to receive it. Upwards of an hour passed thus, an eventful period in the hidden life of Esmé.

As Marchmoram sat with her near the door, a slight movement attracted their attention, and presently a group of ladies entered.

"These are the Thistlebanks," said Esmé; "they are fashionably late."

There were three young ladies, evidently sisters; very tall, showy-looking girls, with high colours and consequential manners: the last the result of a past season in London, where their increase in fashion had steadily kept pace with a decrease in their father's income. Aided by the romance of a Scotch property, a bold assertion of Scotch lineage (which might gain credence in the one country,

though quite untenable in the other), and an imposing entrance into society, not unlike the manner of their present entrance, they had made a way for themselves.

One of the proofs of their success was represented in a fourth lady, who advanced with them; she was one of London's rarest flowers, and more prized on that account than for her beauty. She, too, was conspicuous in height, as were the others; but there similarity ceased. Esmé's eye impatiently swept past the garish, defiant, room-compelling look and manner of the tulip beauties, to rest upon this still more haughty damsel; and while a smile of contempt passed over the lip of the Highland girl, as her foolish countrywomen played off their silly airs and graces, her eye fell coldly and steadfastly on the marked in-born pride of the high-bred Englishwoman: it awoke sympathy in her.

The English girl was tall, thin, and of a clear dark complexion; her eyes were small, bright, and scintillant, but not restless; her

brow low as a Greek's, and her hair ebon black, arranged in admirable taste: she also wore white silk, and upon her head a natural wreath of oak leaves in their fading hues. The face was clever, commanding, and undeniably determined; but it was a face that, since its moulding, had ne'er been crossed by a shadow of sentiment or the faintest glow of passion. It told of natural ability and strong buoyant life, without a particle of heart affection, and showed a mind thoroughly imbued with calm pride and a sense of the dignity of her position.

After some moments' survey of the stranger, Esmé exclaimed,

"Mr. Marchmoram, who is that with the Thistlebanks? what a very striking person!"

He did not reply: what change had come over him? His eye was keen and piercing, his lip quivered and was compressed, and a paleness spread over his face; he seemed restless, just as he might have been when excited by the near approach of a lordly deer within



his range. Without answering he moved away.

Esmé turned to young Couchfern, who was near, and repeated her query anxiously.

"Oh, that is Lady Ida Beauregard, the Duke of Brittonberg's daughter. You must have heard of her; she is a cousin of Harold's: there, he is going up to her."

And a paleness, deeper than that of March-moram's, passed over Esme's face. She heard Lady Ida speak to Harold; her voice was deep, clear, and its tones ringing as a bell.

"Why, Basil, I seem to have come down like an aerolite upon you: I never saw any one more astonished!"

"I had no idea you were in the country, Ida."

"Well, you see I am; and I shall expect you to escort me out of it very shortly: you must be quite tired of grouse shooting by this time." She slightly lowered her voice, "You are surprised at seeing me so far north? a little political sacrifice to please papa. A short

visit to Thistlebank will give him——what I must not mention here. We agreed to pay a week's visit, and he is laid up with gout: I am dreadfully bored there, Basil. You must dance with the Miss Thistlebanks—Miss Rankins I mean.”

Then, with perfect grace, she turned to the eldest Miss Rankin of Thistlebank, and, with great *empressement* of manner, introduced Harold.

She conversed for a few moments with the other sisters in a tone of lively, easy warmth, conveying that idea of friendly intimacy so pleasing to the person addressed, and then moved on to greet an English friend, the Lady Jane Trevor, who was seated by Lady Macdermot Mac Lean.

Esmé observed that, either by intuitive perception, or from a significant side glance of Lady Jane, the amiable weaknesses of Lady Mac Lean were at once discovered by Lady Ida, and that the two friends amused themselves for a considerable time with them.

If ever a woman deserved the sarcasm of superiority, whether in mind or rank, it was this Lady Macdermot Mac Lean. The daughter of a retired Scotch lawyer, and newly raised to the dignity of marriage with an old baronet of ancient family and landed estate, she was in a state of plebeian embarrassment as to whom, amongst her former acquaintance, she should bow. The wife of the parish doctor (who had often clothed and fed her, for love, as a child) of course she must cut; nor did she deign to recognize a tribe of vulgar Edinburgh cousins, who, in their ignorance, had looked forward with delight to meeting her on that occasion. On others she bestowed strangled courtesies, or withered smiles, with painful mental misgivings as to the exact proportion of each, inwardly determining to "read up" etiquette by the next time she entered society, when she would draw the exact line without mistake. Her cross, red face, lanky, ungainly figure, and uneasy vanity, as she awkwardly tried to cut old friends, or con-

ciliate new ones, made her pitiful in her meanness; for she contrived to hurt some honest hearts there.

Esme's eye followed Lady Ida, as, not many hours previously, Marchmoram's had followed her. Lady Ida joined in one or two quadrilles, and moved from room to room with dignified ease; and her manner gave Esmé the idea of a consummate social diplomate. Her manner varied constantly in its minute indications, but was characterised by uniform suavity, politeness, and polished address. It was haughty, reserved, and cold, but with blandishments that ingratiated wherever they were displayed. And yet there was an air of dissatisfaction and a look of weariness on the finely-chiselled features; but no intellectual life. Not a ray of genius beamed in Lady Ida's cold and blank eye, as, for some time, she sat alone. She was *ennuyé*, and longed for a return to a sphere of more stirring excitement: she lived for it, and must have some immediate or remote object to stimulate her

mental activity. We form friendships in early youth, and we make friends later; and in the character of those and these may be traced the leading sympathies of our own natures. Lady Ida possessed no friend of her early youth; but if she had had one now, a friend who knew her character and could depict it, this is what that friend would have spoken of Lady Ida.

“Lady Ida Beauregard possesses great mental strength, with an absence of imagination and of sympathy that renders her unloveable. She lives for worldly success, and never rises beyond it; and were the stimulus to fail for a time, she'd weary and seek it out again. Social excitement is her life—it is her atmosphere, and she languishes out of it. A natural mental bias, and her father's early political education, must have determined her course, in which routine, with inexorable persistence and masculine determination, leads her unswervingly onward; and, in holding up her own father's position and influence in con-

stant sight of the world, lies Lady Ida's ruling passion. Had she been a man, she would have been one of those leaders of men who, by close application and uncompromising hardness, give their soul to the body of the State, and forget its spirit; and with whom golden faith changes into leaden custom, as years deprive of all youthful zest the enjoyment of life. Lady Ida would have been one of those men whom no woman ever yet married for love. But, with a womanly manner and a perfectly graceful tact, she exerts an influence somewhat softer over manly natures, and she has worked out the most uncompromising purposes. Her influence ranks very high in London."

Esmé had lost sight of Marchmoram when he left her so abruptly; but her gaze had followed steadily the striking Lady Ida, and, consequently, now took in a tableau in which he also played an interested part.

Normal Mac Alistair was walking slowly past; he had a slightly sullen cloud upon his brow, and a downcast look; but still there

was something fine in his countenance. Those dreamy, shaded glances from the wild hazel-blue eye, taking in all the surrounding scene, showed that he moralised as he paced slowly on. There might be some dissatisfaction, and a tinge of youthful cynicism, in the absent look; but that was superficial. As he advanced, his gaze suddenly encountered the Lady Ida's: she hesitated for a moment—a flush of indefinable expression passed over her proud pale features—then, with a slight quick gesture, she bowed, approached, and took his hand.

Normal stood with his back to Esmé, but seemed to reply and meet with ease the gracious *empressement* and fascination now apparent in Lady Ida's manner. Assuredly that was no first introduction. Esmé read aright in Lady Ida's polished frankness only the natural expression of gratitude in the woman whose life he had saved: for Normal had told her, when at the Dual Ghu, of his combat with Angus N'Ort; but, for proud reasons of his own, had

forbade her to mention it to the Englishmen. A still deeper sympathy drew her back to Marchmoram, who was within sight, and not many paces from her; but he thought not then of Esmé: his gaze was excitedly fixed on Normal, thus in conversation with his countrywoman. Extreme surprise, uneasiness, and displeasure were strongly expressed in his look: he was puzzled: evidently this young Highlander must have an intimate interest in Lady Ida.

Esmé turned her head away. When she looked again Normal had moved off, and Marchmoram had succeeded him. The manner of Lady Ida appeared to Esmé more haughty than she had yet seen it: with curved lip, and head erect, Lady Ida stood; there seemed to be no intimacy betwixt them. Marchmoram was studiously attentive, but cold and distant in his politeness. Lady Ida dropped her bracelet, and both stooped, and their foreheads momentarily touched each other. Esmé observed Marchmoram profuse in apology; but



no smile passed over either his or her lip, as might generally happen at such a little awkwardness. They were evidently but distant acquaintances. A quadrille was forming, and Esmé saw Marchmoram ask Lady Ida to dance, and they joined it. He was absent and grave; very few words were uttered, and those but the usual commonplace. Lady Ida moved with an unbending tread, and a stony look of indifference, scarcely touching the hand of her *vis-à-vis*, and coldly isolating herself from the dancers around. The quadrille over, Marchmoram led Lady Ida back to her seat, stood beside her with formal politeness, and they conversed for some time. Lady Jane Trevor then came up, and after some lively talking with her, Marchmoram withdrew, and disappeared in the crowd.

A ball in the Highlands is very different from one in any other locality: perhaps as an enjoyment, coming seldom, people determine to make the most of it; or it may be that the associations of pipes and tartan rouse up Celtic

enthusiasm : I rather think it is the latter reason. Certainly no enjoyment could have been more energetic than that of this night : reel followed reel, and even the ladies encouraged each other to keep it up with spirit, by whispered exhortations, as they whirled each other round, of "Caberfeidh for ever, Jeanie!" "Mary, don't say you are tired before the Frasers!"

When the ball broke up, the scene of confusion that followed was even more boisterous than the previous hilarity. To have found a coachman sober would have been almost a reflection on the hospitality of the house; and many of their masters had taken such parting draughts of champagne, that the ladies were all anxious to hurry into their carriages, lest feuds should arise.

Scarcely one of the Strathshielie party went back as they had come. Esmé and Ishbel got a glimpse of Norah hurried away between their father and Harold, as they clambered into a carriage where Mrs. Grant of Seatoun sat, her corpulent proportions occupying the

whole front seat. She affected to be very timorous, and faintly called to the coachman to drive steadily; then she sank back, closed her eyes, and kept waving a fan before her face. The coachman gave a nod when he received his order, but followed it by such a succession of nods that Esmé at once saw his head was not answerable for the movement; and so 'steady' was his driving, that the horses scarce went at walking pace; they had it all their own way.

They were just approaching the descent—a fearful one it was to trust to the sagacity of a drunken driver—and Esmé hesitated as to proposing their getting out and walking down, when Sir Henry Lauriston's mail phaeton, with two gentlemen, passed them rapidly. Mrs. Grant opened her eyes and gave a small scream of surprise, for effect; this so startled the coachman, that with awakened vigour he lashed the horses, and on they rattled at a hard broken trot down the descent, which grew momentarily steeper; the carriage increasing in

its impetus, and swaying frightfully from side to side, as they approached a sharp turn, where the parapet was, of course, wanting. The bank here shelved almost precipitously, only broken here and there by a scattered rock or tree; a deep burn ran gurgling beneath, and the moon lit up distinctly the approaching danger. Mrs. Grant with a shriek of real terror called out "Stop!" the coachman jerked the reins, and the horses began to back; the wheels ground against the low crumbled parapet, and the coachman, in his drunken blindness, pulled them on to the edge.

The danger was imminent: but it did not last long; for Mrs. Grant's shrill shrieks were heard above the plunging of the horses, and, amidst the discordant cries of mistress and servant, Esmé recognised a well-known voice. Leaning from the window, while Ishbel held the door open ready for a spring, she saw Marchmoram, his head uncovered, with iron grasp seize the horses, and endeavour to drag

them onward from the edge; his strong clear voice resounding above the din, in shouts to the coachman to slacken the reins, and urge the horses forward with the whip.

But it was too late: the horses reared up together, and Esmé gave a piercing scream as she saw Marchmoram for a moment carried off his feet. His grasp was upon the mane of one horse and the bridle of the other, and with flashing eyes and determined purpose he pulled down their heads, and urged them on a few paces. The struggle was now over: they backed again, infuriated by resistance, while the drunken driver kept sawing at the reins, and helped them to their fate. Marchmoram let go only in time to save himself, and spring to the carriage door, as the wheels locked on the top of the parapet.

Ishbel was already out; but Esmé was within, and the doorway was blocked up by the unwieldy form of Mrs. Grant, now in a faint of terror. With strength, cruel in its excitement, Marchmoram dragged her out and almost

threw her down, and then seized the white dress of Esmé: the carriage was tottering over as she clung to his arms, and her foot had scarcely touched the ground when carriage, horses, and coachman rolled over, and went headlong down the precipice.

With hands twined round the neck of Marchmoram, Esmé clung to him, and sobbed out, "Oh! Godfrey, Godfrey Marchmoram!" A deadly pallor was over her face; for she had a narrow escape from death.

He only whispered as he held her close, "You are safe, dear one: don't be frightened, Esmé, my darling."

He sat upon the bank and held her in his arms, her head against his breast, and whispered words of love and re-assurance, while she clasped his hands and sobbed,

"Oh, Godfrey, I am glad it is you who has saved me."

Sir Henry Lauriston's mail phaeton had been drawn up, from the moment that Marchmoram had sprung from it; but Sir Henry could not

leave it, as his horses would not have stood alone. A post-chaise with the Glenmardies now appeared in sight; and, on its approach, some gentlemen who were in it, with Sir Roderick and his lady, descended and came up to the scene of the accident: they went down the bank; but Marchmoram did not leave Esmé.

The carriage lay a mass of splinters; one of the horses was already dead, and the moans of the other were so dreadful that Normal Mac Alistair, who had come up, drew his dirk and put it out of pain. The coachman, through that proverbial luck which so oft attends the drunken, was quite unhurt save a few slight bruises.

Poor Mrs. Grant presented a melancholy spectacle, as they hoisted her into the post-chaise: her wig, with all its paraphernalia, had dropped off and been swept away by the wind; but in the flutter of agitation and her attempts at engrossing the attentions of the gentlemen, she did not miss it, and rolled her eyes and fanned herself as if still in all her pristine glory.

Ishbel got up beside Sir Henry Lauriston, and Normal, having given his place in the Glenmardie vehicle to Mrs. Grant, took a seat in the mail phaeton beside her.

Marchmoram lifted Esmé into the back seat where he seated himself; his arms were around her, and she leant her head upon his broad chest, with its beating heart: her eyes were half closed as, in thrilling low breathed murmurs, she half unconsciously repeated his name, again and again.

"Esmé," he whispered in tones of passionate tenderness, "you once said I did not know your heart: oh! could you know mine. Esmé, child, I love you; but I am torn in pieces: oh! why wert thou not destined to cross my path seven years before, ere this other fatal passion gained its ascendancy?"

She started, and trembled like a leaf within his grasp: he held her more firmly.

"Think not it is any rival passion for a woman, Esmé!" and a bitter smile crossed his lip. "No; I never have loved woman as now



I love you! 'tis another worship, as heaven-born and as fearful in its ascendancy. Oh, God!" he clenched his hands with vehement action, "it has gained such power that I cannot hurl it down. Esmé, had I but known you ere this!"

In a low, firm voice she whispered, "Let me reign with it."

"No, that could not be," and a spasm shot across his strongly working face. "Esmé, you know not what I mean. Years ago my choice was made, my soul given up to one master passion: all my energies were bowed to it; all dreams of love foresworn, and one woman chosen as its helpmate; and she a woman of iron will, and trained by worldly expediency. Esmé, child," he continued, speaking rapidly, "believe only this; you are my only love, my dearest treasure! Esmé, you have raised civil war in my soul."

"Say not so," she replied, in low gentle tones, raising her eyes to his with tearful earnestness: "turn not against yourself, God-

frey; may I not love you? If you love me, 'tis all I wish: I would not go with you; but think of me thus: when wearied with the toil and hurry of ambitious life, remember there is a heart in the far-off Highlands, content alone in its love and its remembrance of you."

Ishbel, seated by Normal, had kept silence during that moonlight drive. A strange history had discovered itself: she knew Esmé's secret now. Esmé loved Marchmoram, and she had seen how he loved Esmé. But what a strange, changeful man: in his dangerous fits of uncertainty, his strong reserved will, his over-ruling, ever present influence, Ishbel had never thought of him as loving or beloved: he was merely Mr. Marchmoram, the head, the king of them, whom every one must more or less study and obey.

Auber had been Esmé's lover; and Ishbel's heart had often beat anxiously for her, for she never could feel quite sure of Auber: he was a different man from Harold. But Mr.

Marchmoram! it was something too great to take in at once: she felt stunned by the discovery.

Esmé slept in a small ante-room, entering upon the garden, and on their arrival Ishbel followed her into it. Neither spoke for a few moments; then Ishbel approached Esmé and said,

"Oh, Esmé! you know I saw your feelings: my darling sister tell me what it is. He loves you."

"Don't speak to me, Ishbel dearest; only let me know I have your secret sympathy: I could not speak to you about it. Wait until the winter months; I may tell you then."

And so they parted; and Ishbel kept Esmé's secret: the two sisters were alone in each other's confidence.

The breakfast party next morning was a large and noisy one; the only serious subject being the upset of the evening before. This rendered serio-comic by Mrs. Grant, who banalised the subject, and delighted the

risible faculties of all the young men present by her crazy egotism: she made herself sole heroine of the accident, and spoke throughout in the first person. So completely had self rendered her oblivious of every one else, that she seemed totally to forget that there had been risk to any other human life; and she bridled and blushed as she described how Marchmoram had rushed to her assistance, and the efforts he had made in her behalf: it never struck her that his expulsion of her from the carriage might have been a little more tender.

Harold and Marchmoram were this day to return to Dreumah. Esmé came in late to breakfast, and the only vacant place was one next Marchmoram. He sat in silence; but as they rose, whispered,

“Go to the garden, dear one.”

Esmé went to her own room, took a little trinket from her desk, and then passed into the garden, where Marchmoram was pacing up and down the grassy middle walk. He led her up to a shady laurel copse, where even

the birds were silent, and on the roots of a fallen tree they sat them down, her hand in his, and his low, masculine voice alone breaking the silence. As he spoke, in aroused or restrained excitability, he oft crushed the little fingers in his grasp.

“Esmé, the words of last night were not passing ones: I go forth to struggle. The result is uncertain, and your victory will not be light. You have to conquer, not me, but that within me to which *I* was subjugated. I tell you, child, you can scarce understand the man who speaks to you. Esmé, no woman will ever have wrested higher triumph from man than you, if you win me back from the race I had entered upon. Greater to me is my ambition than glory was to Antony; for it is spiritually the very life-blood of my soul. Can you understand the struggle of a strong and resolute nature against itself? life must turn against its life. Esmé, you are my choice, but I am vowed to another: meantime, try and forget me.”

Esmé cast a reproachful look upon him.

"Yes, Esmé, try and forget me; and if I fail, turn and hate me."

"Never!" she murmured. Then with that tearful gaze, which had lighted on Auber and deceived him, she spoke in measured, but earnest, tones. "Oh! Mr. Marchmoram, so well do I understand you, that here I bid you turn not against yourself. If I am not strong enough, let me quit your path: I told you last night my love would be content in its remembrance and in your's. I could give you no help but by my spirit; and it will ever go with you." Her colour flushed to a crimson glow, as with impassioned energy she continued, "It cannot be fettered; it could not mar you: it will go, and it will follow you where others turn back to earth."

As she ceased, Marchmoram buried his face in his hands for a few moments, then he looked up with his sternest, darkest look, in gloomy contrast to the glow of her's.

"Esmé, we must say good-bye."

She put into his hand the trinket which she had taken out of her desk: it was an antique little seal,—a crescent moon cut on lapis lazuli, with the word “Gradatim” engraved above.

“Take this,” she said, “and keep it for my sake; I have had it since I was a child: it belonged to a Countess Esmé a hundred years ago; the motto always suited me. Mr. Marchmoram, I am not going to be restless any more.” And she closed his hand upon it, with a soft, sad smile.

He clasped his arms round her, in one long parting embrace, exclaiming,

“Esmé, Esmé, so help me Heaven, I will not lose you!”

She tore herself from him, and rushed with winged speed to the solitude of her room.

Marchmoram arose and drew his hat over his eyes: they gleamed haggardly, as he paced several times up and down the silent grassy walk; then, turning abruptly, he hurried into the house. Half an hour later,

he and Harold were on their way back to Dreumah.

No one saw Esmé that day until dinner-time. Norah twice knocked at her door, which was fastened, and, receiving no answer, fancied she had gone on some solitary ramble to the hills or woods. Ishbel did not once go near Esmé's room.



## CHAPTER XVI.

## ENTANGLEMENTS.

My bonny lassie hies away!

GILFILLAN.

I ken ye're thinkin  
 A certain bardie's rantin, drinkin,  
 Some luckless hour will send him linkin  
                                     To your black pit;  
 But, faith! he'll turn a corner jinkin,  
                                     And cheat you yet.  
   BURNS.

A WEEK flew round at Strathshiellie. They were no slaves to time there: hours commingled wonderfully; late breakfasts and luncheons daily merged into dinner; after which, the older

lairds grew prosy over punch and claret, and their sapient discourse on sport and county business became somewhat overclouded. The young men sought the drawing-room, where the piper nightly introduced himself, and dancing and round games were kept up until the ladies were exhausted, when the smoking-room received the stronger men.

Sir Henry and Lady Lauriston were the first to talk of leaving. A long journey was before them, and if they stayed much later in the season, there would be difficulty in procuring post-horses on the Highland road.

It had been arranged that Julia Mac Neil should accompany them from Strathshielie on a visit to England, and two days ere they left, Glenbenrough yielded to Lady Lauriston's urgent desire that Norah also should join the party. There had been a warm early friendship betwixt Lady Lauriston and Norah's mother, to whom Lady Lauriston had looked up as with the love of a younger sister; and she now transferred this affection to her friend's daughter,

to whom she promised to act the part of an elder sister.

There were only two days to think of this proposal, and from its suddenness it came upon all three sisters as a surprise. Esmé and Ishbel would not entertain any selfish regret, though it would be almost the first parting from each other; for it was to be a happy one, as Norah was certain to enjoy herself in England, and spend a luxurious winter there: her letters would be a pleasure to them, and she would write frequently.

The bustle of Norah's packing was soon over, as not much of her wardrobe could go with her: it would not do to wear tartan skirts and Glengarry bonnets in England. Everything was ready the evening before, and Norah was standing at the window of her room, when Esmé joined her, and saw tears in her eyes. Norah wiped them away, as she said, hesitatingly,—

“I am so sorry not to have been able to go to Glenbenrough, to have said good-bye to

our dear old home, Esmé; to have seen the people, and Kelpie, and all again."

Esme knew there was another adieu which Norah would have liked to have spoken, and that it was first in her thoughts just then; so she whispered,

"Never mind, dear Norah; you will meet him soon in England."

Norah half smiled and blushed; and soon all lingering doubt or sadness vanished from her face under the sunshine of Esmé's gaiety.

"Yes, you are sure to meet him. I believe this unexpected visit of yours to Yorkshire has been ordered for you; and I expect it to turn out well in every way. Do you know, Norah, I have malicious pleasure in looking forward to the shock he will get when he hears you are off. I shan't say at first where you are gone to."

When Esmé returned to the drawing-room, her father gave her a letter, addressed to March-moram, to seal. She felt sure he must have

mentioned Norah's departure in it, and thus Harold would hear of it next morning; but she thought it best to say nothing to Norah, lest her sister might count upon the chance of a farewell.

Next day the travelling carriage appeared punctual to the hour, soon after breakfast, and Norah parted from her father and sisters. The latter had sat up half the night together, having last words and little closing scenes of alternate joy and grief over Norah's plans and absence. When Glenbenrough placed Norah beside Lady Lauriston, he gave her over without a parting injunction; but he told her ladyship he would come to England for his daughter ere the heather bloomed again, and that he must carry back with him more than her. Lady Lauriston called out, with a gay laugh, that she and Sir Henry would return to the Highlands with him.

Esmé and Ishbel ran up a bank in front of the house to get a vanishing view of the carriage, and then, with arms entwined, they

sauntered on along the track of the wheels; neither of them spoke, until Ishbel, leaning her head on Esmé's shoulder, said,

"I am glad we are going home to-morrow," a feeling to which Esmé assented with a weary sigh.

When they got back to the house, they found Harold seated in the drawing-room. He said he had driven from Dreumah to pay a morning call; but his absent manner and perturbed expression did not show any flattering satisfaction in the result. He had arrived an hour too late, and Esmé noted well the disappointment depicted on the truth-telling face; for she intended to transcribe it that evening, and devote a page to its description in her first letter to Norah.

As Harold rose to leave, he sent pleasure and pain in swift succession through Esmé's brain; the first was wholly unselfish, for she thought of Norah as he said,

"Well, I must soon be on my southward way. It is time that Harold's Hall should be

warmed for the winter. If you have any commands for Yorkshire, I hope you will favour me with them very soon, Lady Mac Neil; and then," he added (and Esmé heard the closing words with a strange mixture of feeling), "Marchmoram will come south with me; shooting at Dreumah is becoming too hard work: indeed, for the last week, it has been quite nominal occupation with him; he sometimes brings home his gun undischarged. I see that, even so far as the red deer are concerned, his heart is *not* in the Highlands at present."

Esmé and Ishbel returned home with their father next day. How beautiful Glenbenrough looked, as they came in sight of the river, golden in the light from the setting sun, while the approaching gloaming made shadowy the Roua Pass and all the surrounding hills. The russet hues of autumn were now making rapid advance; the wild cherry-trees taking their hectic red of decline 'mongst the changing tints of pale green and golden yellow. This is the time when a Highland autumn takes

its repose, ere the rough snows and storms of winter come to arouse it: the atmosphere floating languidly in a dreamy quiescence, after the warmth of summer; that, were it not for the bracing under current ever streaming from the hills, the death of summer, accompanied by such glorious melancholy of parting lights and colours, would sadden imperceptibly; but the sharp breeze from a distant snow-peak, ever and anon wakes up alacrity of temperament and stirs thought for the future.

Florh was at the house when the family arrived: she had come to hear of the truth of Norah's departure, which she loudly lamented. Esmé and Ishbel went up stairs and looked at the forsaken room; which they constantly visited during Norah's absence, making little arrangements in it as if it were still inhabited. As Florh assisted in unpacking in Esmé's room, she continued to lament Norah.

"Ah weel, ah weel!" she cried, "an' she's gone to England's countrie; but an' it's no you, Esmé, ma guil, I may had my peace. I



hope Miss Norah will come back as she went; but I think there is one will go soon after her. I want none of my bairns to mate wi' England; but an' it's no you, Esmé, dearie, I may had my peace. What would I hae done had you gone in place o' Miss Norah? I would hae gone after you and keepit you from them. I tell ye, Esmé, ye wad nae live in England; ye wad die there! Me that has nursed you knows this weel. I know it by signs too," she added mysteriously, speaking as if to herself. Then aloud, "What could you do, wanting pure air and the rocky rivers o' the north? Could you live in a country where the burns run like kennels, and the air is full o' reek? and would ye like the scent of turnip-fields in place o' the heather and the birch? Avoid it! avoid it!"

"I am not in the least likely to go to England, Florh," said Esmé quietly, "so you need not think of it: and even if I ever did go from the Highlands, I would be very sure to return again and again to them."

"You'll ne'er — ne'er go!" Florh replied; and she crossed herself (after a fashion she had acquired from her Roman Catholic mother) while she looked upon Esmé with the eye of a basilisk. "Ken I no your fate?"

"Oh, Florh! hush, hush!" exclaimed Esmé, sighing feverishly.

"Maybe ye'll be glad to hear that I yet hae firm hand o' the joint clue o' Ewen an' Jeanie Cameron," said Florh after a pause.

"Have they made friends again, then? I am delighted."

"No," Florh replied quickly; "that would not be yet my wish. Oh! that foreign lad o' Mr. Harold's; he's clever beyond compare. I said he was simple; I ken him better noo; an' he kens me: there's that o' cleverness an' management in him that my mind an' my heart draw to him as to a son."

"Florh, I intensely dislike the man!" Esmé pronounced decidedly.

"Weel, he's my right arm! to me o' priceless use: an' I'll yet make use o' him for

yourself', ma guil," she muttered. "Mony 's the hour o' pleasant companie he gies to me : but for him I never could hae staved off frae Ewen the truth o' his lassie's misdoings ; for Ewen is aye at him, knowing that Gupini could gie witness o' any doings at Dreumah : he presses him hard, but Gupini can twirl my Ewen like a sling in his hand. An' I like to see him do it, for I am above baith him an' Ewen. Gupini listens to me ; an' I hae confidence to work wi' him : the lad is really fond o' me."

"Well, I can easily imagine that, Florh ; it is not very difficult for you to glamour where you choose." Esmé spoke in a kindly tone.

Florh smiled triumphantly in reply. "Aye ! had he no cared to pleasure me he would na hae consented, as he did, to bide frae the Dual Ghu ; the life o' which wad hae suited his keen nature better nor the slip-slop fule Theodore, or Mr. Marchmoram's dottled, slow-headed Greaves. To please me, for I wanted

him to spy Jeanie in the gentlemen's absence, he contrived that he should be the one left to bide in Dreumah Lodge."

Florh was right in the apparent fact of her having gained some influence over Gupini; only what she attributed to personal affection for her, arose from the, perhaps still more flattering, merely selfish pleasure her mental resources gave him. Gupini took actual pleasure in Florh's society; it was something congenial and refreshing in that otherwise very narrowed sphere to which this Highland shooting box confined him. He perceived Florh's strength of character, appreciated her natural shrewdness, and accepted them as seasoning her general worldly ignorance. She could listen to his accounts of his travels with intelligent belief, applaud his adroitness, and even enter into many of his experiences, chicaneries, and adventures abroad, as with the spirit of a fellow courier. Thus she gained so much influence over him that she drew out occasionally his confidence. It gave him pleasure

to sit by the cottage fire conversing with this shrewd Highland woman, with a sort of reckless excitement,—she warming equally on a subject with himself; and he even opened to her pent-up views of past scenes and secret episodes in his bye-gone life, which he thought were safe, if uttered only in her ear,—safe as if, by way of mental relief, he had amused himself by talking aloud to the soughing trees and grey-hued rocks of some lone unfrequented glen around her Highland dwelling.

The girls had been settled quietly at home for about a week. Ishbel had gone with Glenbenrough to a sheep-farm at some distance off, and Esmé was sitting in the garden on her rocky seat, writing at a little desk (which she had had since she was a child) upon her knee, when suddenly a shadow fell upon the paper, and the stock of a gun came lightly down upon her shoulder. She looked up with a startled smile, and saw Normal Arduashien behind her.

He threw himself down upon the grass,

saying, "Oh, I am a wearied traveller, Esmé. I have walked from Arduashien this morning, and must be off, and on to Lochandhu, where a dog-cart meets me: I am to be at Strathshielie in time for dinner."

"Back to Strathshielie again! This looks suspicious, Normal," said Esmé, with an arch smile. "I suspect—I suspect!"

"Don't, for you would be very far out," and Normal gave a fatigued sigh. "I am on my way to Thistlebank, for one of the grand stiff visits which the governor thinks it incumbent on me to accept, when the honour of an invite comes in the way."

"Oh! to Thistlebank!" and Esmé's face clouded; she scarce knew why. "Well, you will of course come back this way: I shall want to hear very particularly all about your visit, Normal. Now do notice what takes place in the drawing-room for once, as much as if it were in the woods."

"Why should I do so?" asked Normal, with a slightly sullen look; "what interest

have you there, Esmé? But, indeed," and he slightly lowered his voice, as if seeking no reply, "I may speak in the plural. You have strange interests; they are not readable to me: strange and varying. Esmé, your power is cruel. I will not lie under it."

"You are far more unreadable than I am, Normal," returned Esmé, looking down upon her paper, "and you know you always were. I have just been writing my will, and I have left you a lock of my hair."

Normal's face flushed deeply as he replied,

"I have more need to write my will than you, for I am going abroad. I feel I must throw off home trammels and foolish boyish hallucinations," and he glanced half bitterly at Esmé, whose eyes now opened in surprise, "if I am ever to do any good: I only wait my father's consent to start at once."

"When did you think of this, Normal?" asked Esmé sorrowfully. She whispered to herself, "All are leaving me."

"The wish has long been stirring, and now

can be refused no longer: I am going into some of the realities of life. I shall lead no dreaming existence abroad, Esmé; but seek fatigue of mind and body, and go wherever both shall be exercised." He looked wistfully at her, and continued in a quiet, thrilling voice, "Esmé, the past pleasure in my life has been a secret visionary dream; a foolish airy fabric, that I have spent many a foolish hour over: ever carrying it with me, and moulding and building and colouring it; always striving to add, improve, and alter for the better. There was vivid brightness in it all to me; but—but—I am only a wretched castle-builder, after all."

"They say youthful fabrics are unstable and defective, Normal," Esmé replied gravely, "and you and I are very young."

"Yes; I am unknown, unproved: that is true." And he sighed bitterly. "When I return, it will be otherwise; but then it will be too late."

The next moment a different mood seemed



to cross his mind. Turning, almost savagely, his light hazel eye, sparkling like a hawk's, he said quickly,

"Leave no remembrance to me, Esmé; I don't want it."

"Will you remember me without it?" she asked, looking up with an appealing, half-mocking smile.

"She shall have no triumph," he muttered to himself: then aloud, in a careless tone, "I think we have been friends together too long for either to forget the other, Esmé. I shall be away for a very long time; when I come back to the Highlands you, most likely, will have left them: exchanged the deer's-grass for richer pastures. Whatever changes come over us both, I hope they will be jolly ones!" and he rose and shouldered his gun. "I must go: Ewen is with me, and Florh has a luncheon feast prepared, so I must not disappoint her by longer delay here. Good-bye, until I return from Thistlebank," and Normal strode off, with his strong elastic step.

Esmé called after him, "Remember you use your eyes at Thistlebank, so as to amuse me, Normal."

He looked back, and cried out, "I would fail in interesting you by any descriptions whatever; for I can't imitate the English tongue, Esmé, and I don't believe you are in your old humour of laughing at the Scotch accents just now. However, for your sake, I will observe any Englishman that may be there." And Normal had time to see the glow upon Esmé's cheek as she bent over her desk again, and he went whistling on.

He had done well; he had not betrayed aught of his weakness: had given no look, uttered no word to call forth her compassion. She could not feel that she knew his heart; he had never yet shown it thoroughly to her. Entrenched in his pride; feeling, in self-cruelty, the courage of the stoic, Normal walked on with the step of a conqueror.

Florh was standing at her cottage door, her hand shading her eyes, looking out anxiously

for her son and her foster son. She had mutton-ham, eggs, trout, and whisky ready within, and she was anxious for Normal's arrival. Ewen had been at Arduashien since the visit to Strathshielie; and Florh was delighted to hear he was going on to Thistlebank now: she hoped he would be kept from Lochandhu until the Dreumah party should depart; and she rather hurried him and his young master off, when the latter had finished his luncheon: she had a nervous dread upon her of Gupini coming.

Normal and Ewen took the path past the trysting spring, which Esmé and Florh had visited before; a dog-cart was to meet them when they emerged upon the road, and take them on to Strathshielie. Ewen had a tame fox, which generally followed him part of the way when he left his home; it now ran into the thicket, and a moment afterwards a shot echoed near. Ewen called to his fox, and Normal stepped up a rocky hillock at the edge of the path, to see who the sportsman

was. He caught sight of the brown shooting coat of Marchmoram, disappearing amongst the birch-trees, and he felt at that moment a keener thrill of interest than at the sight of the royal head of a red deer. Normal stood gazing on vacancy, and heard not the yelping of the dogs, nor Ewen's Gaelic curses, loud and deep.

Ewen had called his fox just in time, for the next moment he saw it in chase, pursued by a couple of the Dreumah setters; but the creature, in its sagacity, ran straight to where he stood, and sprang into his arms just as he gave the foremost dog a kick that sent it howling backwards. A second shot, fired in the brushwood at a brace of hares startled out of covert by the noise, and a shrill whistle, called the dogs off; and Ewen saw before him Mr. Marchmoram. The latter deigned no notice of him, but taking out his flask, poured sherry into a quoich, filled it up with water from the spring, drank it, and sauntered on; stepping past Ewen as if he had been a

stone in his path. The Highlander then perceived another person, whom Marchmoram's figure had obscured: it was Jeanie Cameron, seated by the spring. A conscious smile was upon her rosy mouth, and she looked just as she should have done if Ewen had been sitting there with her, talking of future wedding plans. Urged by uncontrollable jealousy he addressed his old love roughly, and spoke with a gibe:

"What are ye doing here? Have ye come to put on the gentleman's plaid for him, lass?"

"An' what have ye 'gainst the gentleman, Ewen? It's none o' your business what I do here: I am no seeking your company, an' let me seek mine where I will." And Jeanie pulled up the fern in handfulls, with an angry, bashful awkwardness.

"Look here, lass! ye must know your own mind, and I must know mine: if ye like to leave me, good and well. Go your gate; take ae lad you loe, an' I'll find a bonnier

lass. But we shall settle it afore the meenister: ye shall tell *him* whom ye prefer, and afore him I'll gie you up. Ye canna refuse the custom," he continued with a shrill laugh, as he saw the colour fade from Jeanie's sun-burnt cheek. "An' now hear the end; ye'll tell your jo', an' I'll give you up: but, lass, lass! it must be no name to disgrace me; it must be a name o' a clan! Gin ye disgrace me by a stranger; gin ye confess to a stranger, to a proud southern-farrand name, tak' care o't! I'll destroy it: I'll blot it out: I'll trample it into Hieland dust!"

"Go your way, lad," Jeanie said, unflinchingly; "ye hae nae right to speak to me yet: our troth was plighted till Martinmass next. If I hae nae changed my name afore that, I'll no be here to tell't to you, or the meenister: maybe I'll be gone to a grander hoose nor you could ever hae gi'en me." And Jeanie glanced into the darkness of the thicket, with a re-assuring smile.

Ewen clenched his hands. "I'll mind your

words, lass; I'll mind your words. Till Martinmass next, take your ways; and then you'll be fain to speak afore the meenister. But oh, take care o' the name!"

He rushed past her, and rejoined Normal, who was considerably in advance. Ewen's head was thrown upwards, as he ran: had he looked down, his quick eye might have caught sight of Gupini, wriggling like a serpent through the heather, and creeping out of sight as fast as guilty fear could take him.

An hour later, Gupini sat in safety on a turf seat by Florh's cottage door. She had her spinning-wheel out, and they were conversing on Dreumah; but Gupini seemed rather absent and taciturn.

"'An sae ye think your master would care na bye for the grand ladies o' Thistlebank?" Florh inquired, as she busily twirled her thread.

"No; he have fresher fancy."

"He's his ain master, is he no? an' he has nae need, an' inclines no to wed for rank and

gold an' high name, as ye think Mr. Marchmoram would; has he no?"

"Him have some romance: he marry only for love; but love very sensible—*bene scélto*," Gupini replied, showing his white teeth. "But me no approve of marriage."

"Why not, lad?"

"If him marry—il buono Signor Harold—me go to Signor Auber. He suit me very well. Benedick master no suit me."

"I would like fine to hear more o' Mr. Marchmoram, Gupini, lad," Florh continued in a coaxing tone. "Did ye hear any name frae Greaves, when he hinted that he was after a grand English leddy. What all did he say?"

"We no speak openly in our life, as I do to you, *amica mia*! No; Greaves only hint that London say Mr. Marchmoram ambitious—ambitious as English are. Pshaw! what dry ambition!" he muttered to himself, shrugging his shoulders.

"But did na Greaves gie a hint that he



was to meet at Thistlebank a high London lady he had long gang hankering after?"

"Si, si; he hinted so: but I know not her name."

"What wad ye say if it's a cousin o' ye're ain master's?"

"Cosi é forse—well it may so be. I know few of my master's friends," Gupini replied, indifferently. "I know little of England now-a-days," he added, speaking the last few words with much less foreign accent.

"Aye; I suspect it's yon grand Duke's daughter. A tall, haughty, dark-eyed lady, high and cold as Ben Madhu, that I have heard before o'," Florh said. "It'll be that Lady—Lady Ida—Beauregard. Oh! lad, lad, what ails ye? the sun has struck ye: keep quiet—hold, let me get ye water!" Florh exclaimed, pushing back her wheel violently, and rising in affright.

Gupini's swarthy cheek had turned a greenish hue in the light of the sun; his lips had lost all colour, and he put his hand nervously across

his heart, as he leant his head back against the wall of the cottage.

"Per Dio immortale! sono uomo morto!" he muttered faintly: "ahi, ahi!" Then, after a pause, "Grazia, Florh! It's nothing: only a heart pang I sometimes take. Bring me some of your strong whisky," he gasped out, as she brought a cup of water. "It's this accursed climate of England: it never suited me, and I must leave it now."

"Drink this, lad, drink this," Florh said, and she poured out nearly half a tumbler of whisky, which he drank off.

"Ah! Florh, that revives my heart!"

Florh watched him silently and anxiously, as, with face averted, he sat there for some time motionless and silent. He then began to mutter to himself; but it was in the Italian language. At last he turned round with a loud laugh: his eyes glittered, and his cheek burnt bright red. The spirit seemed to have mounted to his head, and he burst forth into a sort of ranting frenzy, reciting, with exag-

gerated passion, passages from English and Italian plays.

“On what a melting sea of ice I walk!”

‘Madam, tell me what place is this? for you have led me  
Into a subtle labyrinth, where I never  
Shall have fruition of my former freedom.’

“Aye, Florh,

‘You may as easily think to kiss the stars,  
Cause they to shine on you, as restore those vows!’

‘O beati e bei momenti  
Di delizia e di piacer!  
Ma fuggiron come i venti  
Piango in vece di goder.’”

Florh sat watching him, silently and anxiously, though very quietly, and, occasionally saying, amidst the pauses of his rhapsody,

“Lad, lad! I ken na what ye’re meaning.”

Was it this that urged on Gupini’s tongue still more rapidly? That quietly listening but unthinking ear, took little seeming heed of those exciting words: Gupini might safely follow out his train of thought.

“Florh,” he exclaimed,

'Canst thou be silent,—but apprehend?'

'The vows of women of no more bondage be to where  
They're made, than they are to their virtues  
—Which is nothing.'

'They're all fleshly. Sordid, as is the clay  
This frame's composed of!'"

To Florh, this strange fit of Gupini's was inexplicable: she thought him crazed for the moment by a sun-stroke, and excited by the whisky she had given him—as was partly the case; but at present his ravings were meaningless to her.

Esmé was again sitting on her rocky garden seat the day after Normal had been there. It was about noon, and the sun was at its height; its warmth, and the glittering flow of the water beneath, made her drowsy, and she fell asleep. She dreamt it was a moonlight night, and that she was in a boat, floating down the river with Marchmoram: they swept out into an azure star-gemmed ocean; not a breath stirred, and the tide carried them

silently on towards a silver-clouded shore, which lay far to the east. Faint rosy hues lit up more distinctly as they approached, and then the sun arose. Oh! how glorious was the sight: as the burning orb rose higher, the moon, with all her starry train, sailed mournfully away, and Esmé heard the dying zephyrs sing, as they wafted them on, "Gradatim, gradatim." They landed on the shore, where they beheld cities with domed gilded palaces, environed with waving lines of bending fruit-trees and gorgeous-coloured flowers. Obelisks, inlaid with precious stones, and crowned by pendant diadems, and tall silver crosses, shone glittering through clustering masses of green and purple vines, that spread and entwined luxuriously over everything.

Her eyes, dazzled, turned from sight to sight, as Marchmoram whispered to her to look at the object to which he had brought her. She turned for a moment again to the ocean, and gazed backward on its purple mirror, burnished with the golden rays of the sun:

then she raised her eyes to drink in heavenly love from his. He was gone! She stood alone: she caught one glimpse of him vanishing down the golden perspective of a long straight alley, and heard exquisite music playing far in advance, as if heralding him on. With a cry of anguish she called on him to stay for her, and sprang bounding in pursuit: but from that moment she saw him no more.

She followed with hurried steps; she called his name aloud; she sought eagerly through the gorgeous domed halls and lustrous corridors; but she saw him not. She met cold mocking shapes of a tall dark-eyed woman, who pointed her on with derisive smile in her fainting search, or turned with cold haughty indifference, withdrawing from her imploring touch. She wandered from the gilded city into endless tracts of gloomy ruins and forests, and she sought in the twilight; but she met none to ask, save ever and anon the dark-eyed shape, which still flitted mockingly by, pointing her in fainting energy onwards still. Once she saw Auber's face: he

looked down in the gloom, from a loophole in a mighty ruin; and he laughed, and told her to return. She saw another face gleaming behind his, and a long thin hand, like an eagle's talon, lay upon his shoulder. It was a tall black-eye'd shape, but not the one that haunted her; yet there was a similarity, and, something told her, an ever-existant sympathy between them. She fled faster: thick darkness came down; but still she wandered and sought on: she could never return, for in her dream her love clung almost closer than in waking life. With a sob poor Esmé awoke; she pressed her hand to her eyes, and murmured fearfully,

"I will not go into darkness for him."

She then started into wakefulness, as she saw Ishbel standing beside her, looking strangely excited.

"Esmé, Esmé, what were you dreaming? I was just going to rouse you: I have news to tell you. Oh! Esmé, don't be sorry; but Mr. Marchmoram's dog-cart, with his valet, Greaves, and all his luggage, has been here for the

last ten minutes. He is on his way south: he is going first to Thistlebank, and then on! He is only going to stay a minute here on his way, just to say goodbye. The dog-cart drove round by the bridge; but he is walking over the Roua Pass: come!"

"No, no!" Esmé exclaimed, her eyes quite flashing their colour, and a crimson spot rising on either cheek, as she sprang to her feet and shook back her long waving hair, as if to throw off sleep with it. "No, Ishbel, let me fly! Let him not stay to see me: I will not return till he be gone. Oh! Ishbel, I will not say goodbye. I am nervous: I will not, cannot, trust myself!"

"Oh, Esmé!" Ishbel cried. "Well, do as you like best. I will help you! but be quick, ere papa comes out to look for us. I will say you have gone away for hours. Be quick out of sight."

Esmé, without reply, flew down the garden, bounded through a gap, and went scrambling up a steep hill at the back of the house. She



took not breath, nor stopped to look behind, until the rugged utmost height was gained; then she turned and stood. It was on exact level with the Roua Pass, and the first glance showed her, opposite, the dark outline of a man's figure against the pale horizon of the sky.

On its mighty pedestal she knew March-moran's figure: it was stationary like her's; a stalwart, strong-built contour, with the proud head immovable as a statue's. What was he gazing upon? on nature's grand expanse beneath? Far might the keen eye roam; it could meet nought that would not nurse its fire: nature reared itself grandly round the living soul. Esmé felt giddy, not with the lofty height, but at the thought of being on the same elevation with him, yet apart. They seemed very near: only a short space of air between.

Her spirit had already crossed the gap, when suddenly she knew that he saw her. Eagerly he leaned forward; he stretched wide his arms

and held them open with passionate gesture of embrace: she thought the breeze bore his utterance of her name. With a faint cry, Esmé raised her hands, waved them in farewell greeting, and wildly calling, "Godfrey! oh, come back to me!" she turned, and fled from his sight, down the steep other side of the hill. A still, deep little loch lay at the bottom; she threw herself prone upon its brink and buried her face in the heather.

No quiet reverie this, as on the day of Auber's departure: she lay in a whirl of thought; every nerve throbbing, and her heart strained to its utmost power of tension; the smooth ripple of the water, the only sound that reached her ear, or that would have had the power to soothe. She loved him: he was going; and he did not tell her yet if he would return. What would become of her if he did not? she so loved him! The sun was declining: she would have wished to lie there until the moon rose, and fancy him in the lighted hall of Thistlebank: she would

fain have heard his voice in converse with one more measured to high worldly tone than hers; have marked the regal smile of welcome on his entrance. But it must not be; she must retrace her homeward way. Ishbel was longing for her return, and would come at last in search. When she got home, she must smile to her father, and bring forth music at night, or her secret might become discovered. Aye, she would play her wild Highland laments:—that music would be relief to the dissonance within.

Esmé arose; and as she stooped to bathe her face in the loch, she started and trembled at the reflection it gave back. A pale, pale face, lighted by large luminous eyes of darkest blue, met her, shadowy in the clear dark depth of the water; the lips were parted, and feverishly red: it was a mournful, passionate face; more sad in its early youth, for it told that a cruel hand had already struck it a wounding blow.

CHAPTER XVII.

FORESHADOWINGS.

How fondly would these arms around thee twine,  
Asleep or waking I would love thee aye.

. . . . .

Cold as yon wintry cliff  
Where sea birds chase with wearied wing;  
Yet cold as rock, unkind as wave,  
Isla's maid, to thee I come.

Shadows of constraint were there  
That showed an over-cautious care,  
Some inward thought to hide.

SCOTT.

MARCHMORAM was seated in the drawing-room at Thistlebank, before dinner. It was superbly furnished, in a style to remind one

of London, and was crowded brilliantly. The atmosphere was rather oppressive, from the heat of a huge fire burning in the polished grate, and the perfume of heliotrope issuing from the open door of an adjoining conservatory; whence slightly affected little laughs sounded, proceeding from the Miss Rankins, who were gathering a bouquet; in company with two young English noblemen, who had arrived from a neighbouring shooting-box, on their southward way, and a nice-looking young country girl, Miss Mackenzie of Ben Lie.

The latter admired the flowers, and naïvely confessed ignorance of the learned botanical names which the Miss Rankins fluently poured forth; but she blushed deeply at the stare of inquiry and astonished laugh of one of the Miss Rankins, on her admiring the beauty of a fine scarlet geranium, and at the superlative smile of contempt with which the other said,

“Do you really not even know the *Pelargonium*?”

The poor girl seemed to have felt that her

ignorance had passed the bounds of forbearance or pity, and she replied gaily,

“No; but you should give me a piece: the scarlet geranium means stupidity.”

Yet the Miss Rankins deigned no smile of amiable relief to her embarrassment.

There were several neighbouring country families on a visit at the house, and others were arriving daily to swell the guests round the dinner-table; but Marchmoram's acquaintance extended no further than to Sir Roderick and Lady Glenmardie, Mr. and Mrs. Grant of Seatoune, and Lady Fraser of Forran, all of whom he had met at Strathshielie.

The Miss Rankins moved about condescendingly amongst their friends, but made way deferentially as Lady Ida Beauregard entered, shortly ere the announcement of dinner.

Lady Ida's manner had the highest degree of refinement. Miss Mackenzie of Ben Lie would not have hesitated to address her, feeling certain that the high-bred woman of rank would neither quietly smile contempt, nor draw

general attention upon her; and Normal Mac Alistair would have felt less reserve in answering her when she spoke, than in replying to one of the ill-bred and untitled Miss Rankins.

But Lady Ida was, nevertheless, grave and haughty at Thistlebank. She sat a great deal in the Duke's room, to which he was still confined: she wrote there, and within its seclusion her voice might often be heard in animated conversation; but when she came out, her face wore the expression that it did now, as she exchanged salutations with Marchmoram.

No two faces, masculine and feminine, could have more equally shared the cold quality of impassibility. All expression was veiled in his by a look of silent reserve; and in hers, by the averted scintillant eye, and the lip compressed by a hard politic decision: and yet there was *empressement* in the quiet shake of the hand.

How was the strange and almost systematic contact of Lady Ida Beauregard and Mr.

Marchmoram, which so continually occurred, to be accounted for? To an on-looker their mutual approximation and intercommunication seemed accidental; for certainly neither glance nor smile from Lady Ida lured Marchmoram to her side; yet every time she spoke, a graceful bow of reference brought him forward, to assent or gravely differ. His voice was always calm, his lip firm; but there was a look upon his face during these days which added years of age to it. No light kindled the eye, but it seemed to grow deeper and darker, and the whole power of it to concentrate when he spoke argumentatively.

Lady Ida was certainly very cold and haughty in manner; but this might proceed more from pre-occupation than anything else. She did not repel attention, only she did not seek it; and, as she could not avoid that which was given silently and spontaneously, she received a larger share of it than any other person present.

The evenings were very frozen at Thistle-



bank; but then Lady Ida was naturally, where others were artificially, cold. A uniform unbroken veil of snow wreathed her courtesy, and a naturally icy atmosphere froze her manner: it was refreshing, too, in its way, amidst the glare of painted imitation.

The Miss Rankins were strictly observant of etiquette in look and manner, and had carefully acquired rigidity of aspect and demeanour: each of them was quite able to preside over a stately dinner, with all its tedium of restraint and formality; but there was too much effort to accomplish this, the business and end of their life: they had little idea of aught beyond it. Lady Ida might not relax, either, from a seemingly prescribed routine; but then it was second nature to her, and did not affect her character, save in its externals: as Esmé had said, high birth restrained imagination; she never *had* dreamt of seeking from chamber to chamber of life for herself.

How different—aye, wearisomely different—did the evenings now passed at Thistlebank appear

to one whose energies had been lately whetted by the wholesome ease of Glenbenrough. How different the fresh bloom of the Mac Neil's welcoming home the tired sportsman, and the bright beaming faces which came smiling out to applaud the trophies of his sport, from that sickly smile of fatigued interest now languidly awarded at the dinner table by the fashionable young ladies here. The piquant converse and interchange of the day's adventures, given in racy, natural words, bracing anew all flagging energies at Glenbenrough, was exchanged for the inanity of echoed opera and town gossip, and the weary affairs of public life coming round daily, stale and stagnant—stale and stagnant, because feebly spoken of: the weightiest matter would be mentioned with a silly lisp, or listened to with a vacant stare.

There was no originality to be extracted from one of the young ladies of Thistlebank: only from Lady Ida. Let her speak as she could, and statesmen might listen. Her voice was low, but it thrilled in the ear of a man

of talent, as with native ease she grasped a subject vigorously, and presented it in a new point of view.

Normal Arduashien was very misanthropical at Thistlebank. He disliked going there at any time; but he did not rebel on this occasion, as his father had already partly yielded to his desire of going abroad, and he wished to do everything in the meantime likely to please him, so as to make his father's assent sure. He was out all day long; but in the evenings he sat down in some remote corner of the luxurious drawing-room, and there amused himself with a quiet scrutiny of the company. Lady Ida came in for a great share of observation, and Marchmoram always lay under Normal's surveillance: he was unaware that the latter had paid his last visit to Glenbenrough, or was now on southward way; for Marchmoram and he never entered into familiar converse. They were thrown together one day out of doors, however; and, perhaps, a closer sympathy then arose, unexpressed

on one side, unknown on the other, than fate usually elicits between two fellow men.

The gentleman of the party had gone deer-stalking. The deer were to be driven from Roua Forest towards the passes of Craig Corloo; and to the heights of the latter rocky range Normal went, accompanied by Ewen Mackenzie. The pass which ran beneath was very steep and narrow, and some of the sportsmen were posted in its recesses; but Normal, knowing the ground better, preferred taking his chance from the height above, and firing, at longer range, downwards.

They might have lain for an hour there, without having much present excitement—for as yet neither breath nor sound gave hope of coming deer, and Normal had stretched himself lazily back—when his upward gaze caught sudden sight of very different game. Sailing loftily, obscuring the light of the bright blue sky above him, appeared a splendid golden eagle; and, with drooping, heavy flight, it alighted on a rocky point, not twenty paces

from where he lay: so close, that the flashing of its wild bright eye, as it glanced majestically around; was distinctly visible. It glanced but once around; then, in fearless security, and all unaware of man's vicinity, it began to plume its feathers.

At the same moment Normal's attention was disagreeably distracted by a muttered oath from Ewen; and, looking downwards, he saw the cause: a sportsman, with shouldered gun, advancing along the pass. He recognized Mr. Marchmoram, who thus unfairly (though perhaps in ignorance of Normal's proximity) had changed his own station, and now took a position on the pass right beneath where Normal lay. A sharp turn, round which the advancing deer must come, precluded all rivalry now; for, had Normal fired from above, the chances of death were nearly as imminent to Marchmoram, posted beneath, as to the deer.

Something very like an answering oath to Ewen's escaped from Normal's lips, as he whispered keenly,

"D—n him, I shall lose my shot!"

"Chance it! chance it!" Ewen muttered eagerly.

"Are you mad?" Normal replied angrily.

"No, not though I never shot a deer again!"

"Weel, weel, then, tak' your shot on yon eagle!" Ewen exclaimed determinedly. "Why lose all sport for his sake? he has hindered you frae firing at the deer below; why, then, let him keep ye frae your eagle above? That 'll no harm him, save the disappointment; an' he has na scrupled to gie that to you. Fire! then, fire! Wont Miss Esmé be proud o' yon feathers? she's been wanting some all the year. Oh, fire! dinna lose the chance: the deer are coming!"

Normal hesitated. The noble bird rested within thirty paces: it was a specimen that would proudly stand for a hundred years; one of the finest eagles he had ever seen. To the strength of that temptation let a sportsman alone testify. But Normal only momentarily hesitated; he nobly resisted. "Honour"

was the pass-word avowed; but there were finer accompaniments still. "Do as thou wouldst be done by," and "Be not vilely selfish." These precepts came in strong restraining power upon his manly heart. Ewen bit his lip savagely, as he saw Normal drop his rifle, turn round again on his side, and, with half-closed eyes, watch quietly the kingly bird enthroned on the rock; he leant over the ledge himself and looked down on March-moram's figure beneath, with the angry glare of an ambushed tiger.

The deer were coming, when Ewen's foot or elbow became suddenly entangled; the click of a trigger was heard, the upward toss of a hand was seen, and the rifle lay discharged at their feet, but guiltless of death or injury to any one.

"Good God be thanked! Ewen, how did it go off? There has nearly been murder!" Normal ejaculated, springing to his feet.

"I suppose I made it go off. A mistake; or, maybe, you pushed it yoursel': it was

only on half-cock," Ewen muttered sullenly. His face was lividly pale, and his hands shook nervously: he gave a faint grin, as he said, "It's spoiled his sport whatever; though you saved it frae, maybe, further harm."

The distant echo of the report had yet scarcely ceased, and the smoke was scarcely cleared off, when an angry masculine voice came shouting from beneath. Marchmoram stood out in Normal's sight and with loud incensed tone demanded who had fired the shot.

"It was my gillie, Ewen Mackenzie, in accident; and I regret it much," Normal shouted in answer.

"Why take a confounded ignorant fellow like that, to spoil sport and also run the risk of murder? To say the least, a man is bound to have a suitable servant with him," Marchmoram replied, still angrily: "had I got him here, I'd have horse-whipped him on the spot."

"Silence! be quiet, Ewen!" Normal said,



as he saw the hot blood mount to the Highlander's pallid face; "he has every cause to be angry."

Normal brought home a magnificent golden eagle that night. He tracked and shot, not many miles from the spot, the bird he had so generously sacrificed to Marchmoram's chance of the deer in the morning. Lady Ida Beau-regard expressed a flattering wish to see the unusual trophy, and she went out to the hall and looked at it admiringly, with haughty grace. She said to him that evening, also, when Marchmoram was not very far off,

"Do you know I have a favour to ask of you, Mr. Mac Alistair? I observed a fine eagle plume in your bonnet that day when we met: I should like to have it."

Normal bowed low, and slightly blushed. He left the room and returned with the feather.

"I shall keep it as a remembrance of a very serious day in my life. I suppose that, had you not been so providentially near me, there was no other hope of succour from that

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madman. In what direction had you come—from beneath the gorge?”

“No, I had taken an upper path, Lady Ida; but one as desolate as your’s: I passed but one other human being ere I reached you.”

“A man?” she asked, with a bland, inquiring smile.

“Yes; and an active agile man, too. The shooting-box of Dreumah was not very far off from where you were; and I met your cousin’s Italian valet ascending from the gorge shortly before I came up to you.”

“Is he my cousin’s valet? Good God!” exclaimed Lady Ida. Normal started at her vehemence. Her eyes had a wild expression: she put her hand to her brow, then said, with a smile, “I must really not speak of this adventure; it excites me yet. I am afraid an Italian valet would not have had the presence of mind and courage of a Highland gentleman,” she continued with a serene smile. “By-the-bye, I must read a letter just received from Basil; I am anxious to hear his plans.”

This letter told Lady Ida that Harold had altered his previously arranged plan of going to Thistlebank for a few days, and then proceeding south in company with Marchmoram. He wrote that he now intended going south, direct from Dreumah; merely resting a night at Glenbenrough, a place he must tell her about by-and-bye; and that, as he hoped the Duke would consider Britton the best change of air on quitting Scotland, they would likely soon meet in old Yorkshire again, for he was now on his way home to Harold's Hall.

Lady Ida frowned, and read the note over several times.

After dinner, Lady Ida took up a book and reclined with it upon a sofa near the fire; but as she held a fan before her eyes, it was to be inferred that silence alone was her present object.

Mrs. Grant Seatoune had been plying her utmost fascinations on Lady Ida ever since her arrival, in sanguine hopes of a future invitation to Britton Castle; but she was just beginning

to think Lady Ida not a very good judge of agreeable people, and that she had better reserve her ammunition until the Duke's recovery, and then carry him by quick storm, ere they went south. She now joined Lady Glenmardie and old Lady Fraser of Forran, who drew in their seats within the glow of the fire, and began to chat comfortably. Mrs. Grant heaved a sigh of repletion and contented vanity, as she sank back, and crossing her fat little hands, said,

"How delightful it is to be seated congenially at dinner-time: Mr. Marchmoram made his way at once to where I sat."

"You like silence, then, while you talk, Mrs. Grant?" Lady Glenmardie retorted with asperity (she never had patience for the weaknesses of other people); "I have seldom heard mutual conversation betwixt you."

"Ah, no! gentlemen generally listen when I talk," Mrs. Grant replied, and she nodded complacently.

"What a fine looking man Mr. Marchmoram

is," Lady Fraser remarked; "and he is very wealthy, I believe." (Mrs. Grant nodded mysteriously.) "I never myself met him, or the other Dreumah gentlemen, until the other day, at Strathshielie; but he has been very intimate at Glenbenrough all the autumn."

"'Tis a pity the Miss Mac Neils at Glenbenrough have made nothing by the approximation of so much eligibility," Lady Glenmardie observed, with a frightful sneer.

"Oh, I assure you," Lady Fraser said, rather warmly, for she was a kind old soul, "there were two admirations there; and it certainly would be a wonder if there were not, for few of our Highland girls are more admired than the Glenbenroughs. If the Englishmen did not admire them, Scotchmen do; but I believe Mr. Harold, that tall young man, paid very evident attention to Norah; and, as she is off to England with Lady Lauriston, they may make it out yet: I am sure it's very likely; and, if his friends only know Norah, they won't go against it!"

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Lady Glenmardie saw Lady Ida raise her eyebrows and change her position momentarily, and knowing the connection betwixt her and Harold, and not wishing that her ladyship should inwardly smile at any Scotch ignorance of the English peerage, she came down with a warning crush upon Lady Fraser's foot, which elicited from the poor old lady a suppressed exclamation, and made her move the chair out of reach of her mute but tremendous monitor; while Lady Glenmardie led back the conversation into a safe channel, by continuing to say, in a loud voice,

“Mr. Marchmoram had a slight flirtation with Esmé Mac Neil, I suspect; and they would be well matched. I always think her one of your quiet deep ones: she would do her best to break his heart, as well as he her's. I saw them in the garden at Strathshielie, from my bedroom window, the morning after the upset; they disappeared for a long time, and then I saw her rushing in a frantic state into her room again (the garden one),

while he paced up and down the walk like a madman."

Mrs. Grant quite woke up, and bridled, saying angrily,

"I think you must be mistaken, Lady Glenmardie—quite in a mistake. Mr. Marchmoram gave very little of his attention to Miss Esmé Mac Neil at Strathshielie. You forget that I was present at the upset; and, if he had wished to show her any attention, that was the time for him to do it; but it was *me* he saved there. Never shall I forget it! He dragged me from the carriage at the risk of his own life! He had rushed to my rescue on hearing my first scream: it was *me* he saved. Oh! I assure you Miss Esmé had very little of his attention."

Here an ill-concealed grin from Lady Glenmardie's footman, who was bearing the coffee tray, and who had been an eye witness from the box of her carriage, delighted his mistress, and she replied to Mrs. Grant,

"Oh, I remember; he was so overcome by

your state that he could not even finish his attentions by himself assisting you into my carriage. I hope you lost none of your head that night, along with your heart, dear Mrs. Grant."

Ere Mrs. Grant could think of her vanished wig, the gentlemen entered, and the ladies' circle broke up. Two of the Miss Rankins were executing a duet on harp and piano, and people were all sitting in knots and corners, rather enjoying the change from quiet yawning over portfolios of drawings and prosy gossip with dowagers.

Mr. Marchmoram was standing very near to Lady Ida, who still sat on the sofa with the book in her hand; for she seldom moved from one seat all the evening. Miss Rankin was sitting by her, and she and Lady Ida conversed *sotto voce*.

"By-the-bye, I always wished to ask you the name of a pretty girl in white, with flowing golden hair, at the Couchfern ball. She was so graceful and aerial, she might have represented Miranda or Ondine."



"Oh that was the second Miss Mac Neil of Glenbenrough," Miss Rankin replied. "I thought I had told you her name at the ball. We know them very slightly."

"There was something mystic in the peculiar blue of her eyes. I could not help noticing them, as I happened to find them very frequently fixed on myself. Is Glenbenrough a very wild place?"

"You must really ask Mr. Marchmoram," Miss Rankin said; "he has been there *so* much this autumn. I don't think I could describe it."

"Ah!" exclaimed Lady Ida, with a slight look of surprise: then turning to Marchmoram with her cold haughty voice, she asked, "Is Glenbenrough a very wild place? suited to the second sight and prophetic mysteries, Mr. Marchmoram?"

"I dare say it is, Lady Ida," he replied in a low tone; "it is a very enjoyable place, and very beautiful."

"You liked being there!" remarked Lady

Ida, with a curious smile on her thin lip.

‘Yes: it is a place that takes much age off one’s shoulders.’

“Ah! you were in the midst of youth, of free and unfettered spirits!” There was the slightest tinge of satire in her ladyship’s tone.

“Yes, free and unfettered: the scenery there is conducive to that. Put genius amongst the hills, and they will early bring it to maturity.”

“Aye: but leave it there, to burn but a beacon light, Mr. Marchmoram!” Lady Ida returned quickly. “Its fire would not suit projects in the great city plains below.”

“That depends on the quality of it, Lady Ida:” and Marchmoram’s eyes darkened strangely upon her. “If ambitious, genius would lead ambition on.”

“Yes,” she replied, looking up fully in his face, and speaking slowly with her former smile, “if chosen at the first: but young genius is seldom practical. Strength should go with strength: is not this your creed?”

"I have ever acted on it," Marchmoram replied, while a shade crept over his face, giving darker firmness to the strong-marked features.

Lady Ida's quick eye glanced exciteably as she continued,

"No one should look back on the great highway: striding nobly in the onward path, with victory full in view, he would not deserve to win who should look weakly back on a lesser prize in the path, or stoop to carry it with him."

"Evil temptress," murmured Marchmoram inaudibly, and his eyes darted almost fiercely on Lady Ida's face, while he replied aloud, "Strength with strength was always your creed; and formed almost ere it became mine, Lady Ida. Well do I remember the time when you told me so, and when you considered my strength to be—weakness: you would have nothing to do with it." He smiled almost malignantly as a blush, deep as carnation, suffused for a moment the woman's cheek of Lady Ida, in spite of her strong nature.

She replied immediately in a low firm voice, "Well! impetus was what you desired: did I not give it?" and she looked up with a deep meaning glance: no softness in her look, but an almost wondrous masculine decision.

"Yes," he said, the shade falling darker on his face, as he stood before her in attitude of cold, proud reserve, "and I have advanced rapidly; and will go on, for *other*——"

She listened eagerly, but the move being made of general withdrawal, people drew near, and he fell back without finishing the words. She put out her hand, and whispered, as she said good night, "Few are so strong as you:" and then swept off.

His lip twitched silently, and almost unconsciously he returned the pressure of her haughty hand.

## CHAPTER XVIII.

## LOVERS' ADIEUX.

"He passed the court gate, and he sped the tower grate,  
And he mounted the narrow stair."

. . . . .

"I hae naebody now, I hae naebody now  
To meet me on the green,  
Wi' light locks waving o'er her brow  
And joy in her deep blue een.  
There's naebody kens, there's naebody kens—  
And, oh! may they never prove  
This sharp degree o' agonie,  
For the loss o' their earthly love."

"Oh! think nae ye my heart was wae.  
When I turned about away to gae?"

THE ladies were still lingering in the hall,  
or slowly mounting with floating drapery the  
broad flight of stairs to their rooms, when

Marchmoram hurried through. Neither looking at, nor listening to, anything around him, he hastened through a long side corridor, and entered his own room. Shutting the door, and locking it, lest his valet should come to disturb him; with quick and perturbed steps he paced up and down the apartment.

Marchmoram's nature was one of those that, like some deep seas and lakes we know of, suddenly arouse and lash their waves in wild dreadful play, with little visible cause. His nature was of dangerous excitability: strangely quick and ready to rise, but with a stern governing will, he held a strong curb upon himself. His passions might rage at will within; but they should show no semblance without: he could prevent that, at least. Yet, hidden within his breast, their turbulent currents surged to and fro in fierce conflict, and, in secret did their work more surely. The time was come to let them loose just now: their warfare was beginning, and he must give them room, or they would rend the walls of

their prison. No one of phlegmatic temperament could scarcely believe the evidence of his senses, to have seen Marchmoram this night, alone, under the dominion of his passion. The fire of almost insanity burned in his kindling eyes, as he paced the room up and down in a paroxysm of excitement, his lip quivering, his strong hands clenched, and words, almost incoherently, pouring out with frenzied vehemence.

“It is within my grasp—within my grasp now: the determination—the vow of years! I know it! I feel it! When my boyish ambition fastened on the idea, it was rudely thrown off; but it seized it again and never let go: the glorious conquest is in my grasp! my power has served me well. Shall I now turn to the dalliance of love? were that well done? no! no! ill done, ill done. I must play out my game: the stake is risked, and the die is cast. Oh! Esmé! Esmé, mine! feel for me, feel for me! This woman requires revenge: she was proud and cruel to me, Esmé! I did not love

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her; but my boyish aspirations worshipped her intellect. Love! what knows she of it? I knew it not myself till now. But I gave her that which, to her, meant all: I gave her my ambitious hopes and worship. To her that was the life-blood of the heart: it stirred the depths of her feeling when she knew me ambitious as herself. And in that she should have shown sympathy: I would have taken it then, though coupled with refusals. But she spurned me! 'Strength with strength,' she said: 'I will match with my equal.' She laughed at me; she despised my power; she tried to crush me with her irony: oh! foolish woman, have I not conquered thee at last? Her scorn gave me a new impetus; her disdain urged me on with fresh energy. She had not time to disentangle her early interest from mine: it went with me. She has unceasingly watched my career, and she sees success before me; all sought and won in spite of her.

"Oh, Esmé! I vowed that she should swell my triumph at the end: for years I have



strained and striven for the time when she should bow to me; when, with her great power, she should work subservient! Do you not wish this crown of victory for me, Esmé? Shall she not be made subservient? Esmé, Esmé, say this to me! 'She sneered at you as a boy; make her marry you now you are a man!' These words have I whispered: I have scourged my heart with them as with whips, when I have felt you undermining there. Oh, Esmé, if she still held aloof! Were I not to meet her, I might forget, and turn to the loved one in my path. But risk it not; oh! dear one, risk it not. I have so vowed, so dreamt of conquering her, that to meet her, were I bound outwardly to thee—and so she must feel safe—would madden me. Let me conquer her first; and then let me seek you, if not lost! Esmé, I will see you: I will tell you all! Let me go out to breathe the free air."

He threw open the window. The moon was at her full, and sailing rapidly past, amid

stormy white-flaked clouds; shadows lost themselves hurriedly on the naked rocks, or danced grotesquely over the grassy slopes: unrest seemed everywhere; without as well as within. The window was but a short distance from the ground, and he jumped out. The roar of water guided him to where was a waterfall near the house; a path led up to it through a straggling wood of Scotch firs. He sat him down upon a dilapidated rustic seat, near the edge of the bank and overhanging the fall.

The wind soughed fitfully through the pines, and his pulse throbbed to its music. But as he sat, nature calmed: the breeze died mournfully away, and the moon came floating out from the shadow of the wood; her serene orb hung pendant in silvery brightness right above the waterfall, its foaming spray glittering in the rays. All was still and quiet now; the air scarce stirred sufficiently to sway the tendrils of the weeping birch, as its long feathery tresses swept downward against the sky. He gazed up to the heavenly blue above: Esmé's

eyes shone in that pure deep hue: it sank melting to his soul.

Marchmoram arose, and, like one in a trance, he traced his way to the stables, which were about half-a-mile from the house. The doors were unlocked; he entered, took down a saddle, and went up to one of the horses, which had turned in the stall and, snorting, watched him with seeming wonder expressed in the soft brown eye: he saddled and led the animal forth, mounted and rode slowly away towards Glenbenrough.

It was between two and three in the morning when horse and rider emerged from the hill track which Marchmoram had taken, and came out upon the road a little below the bridge. The old grey house looked very quiet in the moonlight, and the river flowed darkly and sleepily along: not even the solitary hoot of an owl from the thick old trees in front, where they nightly congregated, broke the stillness. Marchmoram here dismounted. His face, pale as marble, seemed more immove-

able than aught in sleeping nature around: the lips were firmly closed, but the troubled spirit looked out from his eyes. He led the horse across the bridge, tied the bridle to a tree on the garden bank, and walked towards the house.

Esmé had sat up late in her room, reading and writing, and had fallen asleep while listening to the wailing winds without, and watching the moon drive past before the pursuing stormy clouds. The window in her room was curtainless, for she always liked looking out nightly upon the heavens from her pillow ere she fell asleep. She had been sleeping for some time; her fancy wandering wildly in dreams, when, on a sudden she woke up—as from a strange inward impulse—opened wide her eyes, and, with an electric feeling of surprise, started into wakefulness. What was impending? what was this? A chill, nameless feeling of awful uncertainty crept coldly over her, as if it were a mysterious foreboding of a spiritual presence.

All was still, without and within: the midnight sky was overcast. Presently a sound was heard beneath the window; her ear caught the sound of a quiet footfall; a step approached, crushing the gravel: some one stood motionless beneath the window. Esmé pressed her hand tight against her heart to keep down its bounding pulses, as feverish reaction sent the tide of life coursing rapidly through her veins: her whole being was absorbed in a dreamy, breathless suspense. Was it real? What—who could it be?

The hall-door creaked slowly upon its hinges; a step was heard slowly and firmly ascending the stairs: she heard breathing outside the door, and knew the lock would turn. Her eye dilated, and the throbbing of her heart became intense as, in breathless silence, she lay expectant. The night grew gloomier; thick clouds obscured the moonlight; but she could distinguish a shadow falling from the opening door, and advancing almost in the centre of the room: an awful, indefinable shadow. It

fell upon her pillow ; it assumed material form. In a low, deep, and thrilling murmur, Esmé heard her name. Her outstretched arm was grasped with warm living pressure ; and, standing near her in the darkness, whispering low, Marchmoram spoke.

“ Esmé, Esmé ! loved one ! wake and hear me ! ”

Her lips moved, but formed no word : they quivered convulsively. She felt the blood mount to her brain, which reeled dizzily. No answer came : but Marchmoram must have known that she heard him, for he spoke again, in hurried, urgent tones.

“ I have come to tell you—to tell you this : sooner or later I will claim you. Esmé, through all, through everything, trust my love ! Let your love be faithful and strong as mine, and sooner or later I will yet return to claim you. Be this hour, this night, this ring, our pledge. Esmé, Esmé ! tell me you hear and believe me. ”

The voice that had exercised greater influence

over her than aught other on earth, could bring no answer now. Esmé was indeed spell-bound; for almost ere he ceased, overwrought feeling brought upon her that weakness which she had ever dreaded, but never met before—unconsciousness: she fainted silently away, and lay as one dead. At that moment Ishbel, in the inner room, awoke and turned restlessly on her pillow; while Marchmoram, with stealthy footfall, quietly and slowly descended to the hall door.

Dawn was breaking greyly over the hills, and tinging with pale blueish hue the red precipice of the Roua Pass, as he loosed the horse's bridle and led it down the river bank to Esmé's spring, beside the ruined old stone cross. He knelt and drank deeply there. A wooden ledge ran round the rim, which Esmé had placed for kneeling on when she stooped to drink. He wrote upon it in pencil, "Godfrey—Friday night," then mounted and rode on.

As Marchmoram was leaving the house of Glenbenrough, the figure of a woman, wrapped

and hooded in a large blue homespun cloak, loomed through the early morning mist, on the opposite side of the river. It was Florh Mackenzie, returning from a cottage near the farm of Phee, where an old man had died the previous day: she had been observing the general custom of the country in taking her turn to watch the midnight hours beside the unburied coffin. She was wending briskly homewards now, so as to be in time to attend to the early milking of the cows. As she passed the house, her eye hastily glanced across the water, and she instantly recognised Marchmoram.

Florh's nerves were well and steadily strung; but still she was startled, and paused in sudden wonder. What did he there at that strange hour? He had not been at Glenbenrough that night: he had said good-bye, and left Dreumah some time ago. She darted behind a birch-tree, crouched down, and watched him with the wariness of a fox. She saw him go lingering past, with his head turned back toward Esmé's



window; and as he moved down the river bank, she retraced her steps and followed also. She saw him reach the tree where the horse was tied, loosen it, and lead it on to the spring, at which he drank. As he mounted and galloped away at speed—showing that he thought it was time he should be gone ere the sun rose clearer—she threw up her arms and called after him a strong remonstrative sentence in Gaelic: had he been dragged dead up to the door of Thistlebank, such would likely have been the fulfilled translation of it. She then drew her cloak tightly round her, and walked sturdily on to Lochandhu.

No time was now to be lost, lest curious eyes should witness his return; and recklessly, exultingly, he urged the animal on through bog and dell, over slippery rock and across bed of streamlet.

Well might the good horse be blown, and his sleek coat be flecked with foam, when, relieved of his rider's weight, he trotted up to his stable door: he had been hard pressed on a

two hours' fearful gallop. By a direct but dangerous track through the hills, Marchmoram had gone from, and returned to, Thistlebank.

An under groom was moving drowsily as Marchmoram rode up, and the man gave a knowing wide-awake nod as he led the horse into the stable and closed the door. Marchmoram in dismounting had thrust a five pound note into his hand, saying,

"I had occasion to take the horse: rub him down."

What mattered it to Donald where the horse had been taken to? He never talked of Marchmoram's ride; he was honest, and knew what he had been paid for: he was also naturally a taciturn and cautious Scotchman.

"Maybe the gentleman had gone off to spear a salmon wi' the young laird o' Couchfern, though it was close time: and what harm? Or, maybe the gentleman had gone to the hill to taste a drop o' rael stuff, and see the working o' a Hie'land still. 'Deed Donald did na care."

But Ewen shared the truckle bed of Donald in the loft above the stable. He heard March-moram come home, and he had seen him ride away; for he was in a sleepless mood that night. However, he never discussed his joint knowledge with Donald, nor claimed any reward for secrecy. He also was a Scotchman,—quiet, taciturn, slow, and cautious.

The ladies had left the dining-room ere March-moram appeared at breakfast that morning; but in the forenoon he walked into the drawing-room shortly ere the arrival of the post. Lady Ida was present, and gave her usual salutation with haughty grace. There was something very imperious in her general manner towards March-moram; but his seemed to require it: it bore such an air of masculine self-control when in converse with her; and the satirical smile, or the cool defiant eye, was always ready to bear down her pride. Occasionally at other times, when she condescended to exert herself sociably and let fall a little frothing conversation, while all others listened deferentially,

Marchmoram turned absently away, with a perfectly well-bred, but very repellent, indifference. Notwithstanding these antagonistic influences in manner, they constantly sought each other out, and commingled curiously.

The Miss Rankins slightly bantered him on his late appearance; while he entered into livelier badinage in return than they were able to support, until the happy arrival of the post saved the failure of their wit; when all were engrossed in their correspondence. Marchmoram retreated to a window with his letters and papers, while Lady Ida sat down with the *Times*, ere she opened any of her despatches. Suddenly she exclaimed, in a low voice,

“Oh, poor fellow! Papa must instantly write. If we take it in time we shall succeed;” and, folding up the paper she left the room.

The eldest Miss Rankin who had been seated near Lady Ida, also glancing over the news, looked after her with a species of admiration, and muttered,

"Well, that certainly is the most iron-nerved woman imaginable."

"Has she read of any bad news, poor dear lady?" old Lady Fraser of Forran inquired anxiously.

"Yes, in one way," Miss Rankin replied: "but she is only thinking of how to turn it to account. I would not know it, but my eye fell upon the paragraph she was reading; and she was talking on the subject politically only yesterday: see this." And she read aloud from her newspaper,

"We regret to learn that Sir Francis Sornton, the popular M.P. for Lilledale, lies almost hopelessly ill at Sornton Hall, in consequence of the accident met with in hunting on Friday week, and which we mentioned at the time."

"He is such a nice creature! I have met him in town, and he married only lately a friend of Lady Ida's. Her ladyship became rather excited yesterday in talking of his representation of the great borough of Lilledale. Sir Francis is a Whig; but she said were he to vacate, a great triumph there might be gained

by the Conservative interest; and now she is so absorbed in the probability, that I really believe she forgets all personal feeling, and has gone at this moment to discuss with the Duke the consequences."

"My dear, my dear, I hope not," good old Lady Fraser said hurriedly, pushing up her spectacles with nervous wrinkled hands; "few men could be harder than that. Oh! may God preserve us from the world in its many shapes o' heartlessness!"

"They all take refuge in——expediency, Lady Fraser," Marchmoram said, with a peculiar curl of the lip, as he vanished quickly from the room.

The kind old woman did not like nor understand the look; but she felt that, at any rate, it expressed no contempt for herself or her simplicity.

Marchmoram proceeded to the Duke's sitting-room: he had had the *entrée* of the Duke's room ever since his arrival. The Duke was nearly convalescent and expected to join

He was reclining at a round table with a library table before it, and the resemblance betwixt himself and Langdon, who sat near him, was very striking. He was a tall thin man, with grizzled hair and dark complexion: but his eyes, being grey, instead of black, gave an expression of greater humanity to his face: there was more reason, and, though perhaps less talent. He had a settled thoughtful look; as of a man who, having chosen his work, becomes interested and absorbed in it as much from habit as from inclination.

The Duke and Lady Ida were talking of Liffade as Marchmoram entered: a portfolio and papers lay before her. Steps had to be taken and letters written: Lady Ida understood all, and was ready. Marchmoram gazed at the inflexible figure, and listened to the keen reasoning with which she spoke on this and other dry and weighty matters. There was, indeed, no sentiment about Lady Ida; she was all practical and persevering. Bold

as Jael, and as uncompromising, she drove the nail and triumphed; but never rose to enthusiasm in success. She calculated now on Sir Francis' death; but she did not wish it: she truly hoped he would recover; but still the rugged fact of its close possibility must be dealt with. If he died, the seat was empty, and possession must be immediately secured by them; if not, others would supplant, making for ever irremediable the weakness of any present delay. No picture of the young bride-friend, then wailing and praying for her husband's life, rose to disturb her clear business views.

Ruthless in expediency, Lady Ida prepared for the noisy glare and the rude contested election shout, that was to carry victory to her father's party and anguish to the agonized heart of her mourning friend.

Marchmoram sat a long time in the Duke's room: he wrote there, spoke, listened, and worked; then arose and went out, to be refreshed by nature on the Highland hills.



Normal Mac Alistair rested at Florh's cottage at Lochandhu some days after this: he was on his return to Arduashien from Thistlebank; where a feeling that he owed only to himself, had delayed him so long—it was a craving desire to witness Marchmoram's departure from the country. He was going soon himself; but there would have been no peace in his own parting days had they been shared, however vaguely, by Marchmoram's presence also. He had seen him go, and knew that his rival had left Thistlebank for the south two days previously. Normal said adieu there as soon as possible after. All the English visitors would soon be away; for the Duke of Brittonberg and his daughter, and a Lady Jane Trevor, a gay, talkative woman, who had lately joined, had fixed an early day for leaving Thistlebank, and travelling homewards altogether.

Normal sat before a peat fire in Florh's cottage, smoking a cigar: its fragrant smoke mantled soothingly o'er his senses; for he looked content: no sullenness was on his brow; and

he leaned back with enjoyable ease, and unusual light of pleasure in his eye.

Florh sat in her birchen rocking chair a little back from the glow, and rather in the shade of the room: she watched Normal and studied every line in his face, as she swayed herself to and fro; and her words came forth smooth and flowing with the motion. Florh looked a handsome woman, with her cool hazel eye, full red lip, and strong, broad-chested figure. The fox that Ewen had tamed, lay at her feet, curled up beneath the folds of her tartan gown: he seemed to be a listener in the *tête-à-tête* of Normal and his mistress, for he raised inquisitively his pointed nose, and cocked cunningly his foxy ears as they talked.

Florh had gained much more influence over Normal than over Esmé: indeed, over the latter she possessed it principally through affection. Esmé had given her that, with the buoyant warmth of her nature, ever since her childhood; but she had remained unsusceptible to the cunning lurking in her foster mother's

caresses. But Florh, exerting all her tact, had subtly penetrated the reserve of Normal's character; and had got to the very depths of it: she sounded them, and wrought forth the good or evil at will.

Normal was more open with Florh than with any one else: no boyish reserve ever restrained him when alone with her: and it was a great relief to talk, as he did now, with perfect openness.

"Well, Mathair\* Florh, I shall have a little quiet time I hope at Glenbenrough now, until the time is fixed for my going abroad. My father leaves the day to my own choice, and I would like to have such a parting time at Glenbenrough, as I may look back upon afterwards."

"Ye hae need o' that, Normal dear: it would ill become ye, after all the years that hae passed, to go glooming away. Your pleasure at Glenbenrough was too much shared this summer."

\* Mother.

"Yes, Florh," he replied, looking quietly into the fire; "it was not an autumn at Glenbenrough to please me."

"Aye, ye may say yon. What right had the English sportsmen o' Dreumah to come harrying down on that which no rent ever could have gien them?"

Florh threw deep meaning into her voice; and, as Normal looked up at her, she continued,

"Aye, ye ken what I mean, Normal. I grudged the red deer o' the hills o' Glenbenrough, and I grudged sore the bonny roe playing in the garden coverts: I grudged the very bread in the house that the English broke."

Normal reddened and fidgeted on his seat, as he answered,

"It was not likely I should like their intimacy, Florh; for it gave me a sore heart. Oh! that I could for just that time have exchanged with them, Florh! Could I but have given them an eye and hand for a tongue, they would not have harmed or hurt me as they did. I

would have seen my rifle miss the deer, as I oft saw their's do—I would have seen the grouse fly winged away—I would have shrunk from swimming at night the cold loch of Nightach in pursuit of my wounded stag;—could I but have played a part to better suit a woman for the time! But I could not talk with a borrowed, fluent tongue: I could not assume the polish of the high-bred gallant in my manner: I could not dance with their foreign grace, nor dare the intimacy of their fond grasp! No; I could but beat them on the hill, when no woman's eye was there to see; and where I durst not boast, lest the conquered should despise me, and I despise myself. My eye was first, my aim more sure; but bootless that triumph in the walls of Glenbenrough. My tongue was silent in the drawing-room: it suited not even the stillness of a sunny hour in the open air. They could even speak better to the fancy of her I loved on the very subject of my native scenery. When we all sat out together on the glorious hills, they robbed for

me the colours, and laid them in words of beauty at her feet! I could only feel. I never could speak forth my thoughts." And Normal's eloquence rose to its height, as he now poured forth his bitter feelings of tortured pride, and unbending conviction of his own inward equality with the strangers.

Florh did not rouse him up: that was not her object: she would rather calm him in the mean time; for she loved her foster son, and she had yet to lay other things before him. He should not go abroad in ignorance of her own surmises as to Esmé; but they must be very cautiously and gradually propounded. The only thing she might give full vent to was her hatred of Marchmoram: and, to justify this, and bring forth a satisfactory response from Normal, she would bring home the terrible fact to him. She began cautiously, saying in a beseeching tone, different from her first,

"To gae frae Scotch an' English to Forriners! Oh! it's me that wishes you could tak my Ewen wi' ye, when ye go, Normal dear: och

hone-a-rie, it's little ye ken the weight would be off me!"

Normal looked up with a little surprise at her sudden vehemence, as he replied,

"You know, Florh, you could not wish him to go more than I do; but my father is absolutely *dour* on the subject. He says if I have Ewen to talk Gaelic with, I'll never learn any other language. Wait a year: if I do not then come home, I'll send for him. A year is not very long for him to be separated from me."

"I am no sae foolish as to make a work for that," Florh replied, "nor for longer time; but there is a reason now why I'm praying to get free o' him, till I see my way for his happiness clearer. Oh, Normal! I'll open my heart to you; for it's little comfort or good that came o' me doing it to Esmé, puir lambie!"

Then, with gesticulative energy, and keen biting words, Florh laid before Normal the evidence of Jeanie's guilt, as she had long

previously done to Esmé; only that the details were fully marked now: for Gupini had fully satisfied her on them all, leaving very little doubt on the subject. And Ewen, even, had given the strongest proof to her, where only suspicion had struck himself, in telling her of the day that he and Normal had found Jeanie and Marchmoram in such close proximity at the spring.

Normal took the cigar from his mouth as she concluded, and striking his hand, exclaimed,

"Villain! he would not be safe from poor Ewen's dirk, did he but know of it!"

"Aye, see ye no *now* why I should want Ewen out o' the country. His secret mind is ever on Mr. Marchmoram; and, did he find it out for certain, oh! what but vengeance wad satisfy him? Ewen's pride first cankered agin him at Dreumah: an' he always looked at my Ewen as if he was ane o' his hounds, after that. 'Deed he has been more civil to a dog nor to him. But the worst was the day he struck



him at Corrieandhu, for offering to guide Miss Esmé's pony."

"I remember that," Normal said; and his brow knit, as he threw the rest of his cigar into the fire.

"My heart is sair to get Ewen out o' the country. Gupini is off: and since that day (Mr. Marchmoram left Dreumah just about the same time) Jeanie has no been seen at kirk, or even about her father's door. Gupini worked wi' me to keep it quiet frae Ewen, for he knew his temper; but gin he return next autumn, an' Ewen in the country, I dout he can always withstand frae telling it. But Ewen away, the secret's safe: an' I'd make up my mind now to end it for Ewen at the last."

"That will not be easy, Florh!" Normal exclaimed, and he flushed angrily. "Ewen shall never marry this girl. At least, if he has the meanness to do it, never let him expect me to take notice of him, or of her, after!"

"Weel, ah weel; it's me that is sair tried!"

cried Florh. "I wad wish my son's happiness: he and Jeanie hae been such long years contracted:\* ye hae nae notion o' the feeling in him o' it all. The silly lass is sure to repent; an' could I keep her secret frae Ewen, I don't know but in time I might let him take her. She would bē sure to mak him a guid wife, wi' me over. What a haud and a power I would have on her all her life, Normal! Me, wi' her secret in my very hand!"

Florh spoke with a sort of gusto, as characteristic love of power crossed her mind.

"Florh," Normal replied quickly, "let there be no counterplots and concealments. The marriage must be broken off. You have only to speak to Ewen's pride: tell him Jeanie is worthless; but conceal the name of the man. He need never know that. He *must* never know it!"

"Aye, you know the madness that might come on him!" Florh exclaimed. "All along

\* Engaged.

I determined that he wad never hear Mr. Marchmoram's name from me, whatever he might think. I could break off the match, too; but I like seeing my way lang, lang before me, and working out to the end: no to end things sudden, like."

"Well, I shan't have Ewen abroad until you make an end of it, Florh: and you are too clever not to be able to manage this in the best way."

"Weel, weel, I must think, Normal, dear: your word is my law. I will think. Their contract is not over till Martinmass, and I could not break it, nor anyone else, till then."

She sat in silence in her rocking chair, gazing anxiously on her foster son, who had resumed smoking, and was stirring the turf ashes absently with his outstretched feet, as he leant back on his lowly seat.

After one or two attempts to speak, ending with abrupt failure in a nervous cough, Florh at last broke silence again; and her voice strengthened soon into kindled energy.

“Oh, Normal! this Mr. Marchmoram is a bad, bad man! I will go on wi’ him, now, and speak free to you. Why should my bairn, my bairn Esmé—the flower o’ our hearts—be misguided? be the only one misguided, and, perhaps, ta’en from us all? Aye, Normal, there’s Miss Norah; though ’tis an Englishman fancies her, and she fancies him, no great harm past that o’ his birth will come of it. His heart is good, his mind is high enough; an’ if she be content to leave her bonny Hielands, I’ll no say but she may find content enoo in England countrie. There is no doubt she has chosen pretty weel. But Esmé—oh! Esmé, no good will come of it! Did she no dream before ever she met them? Normal, she was warned, early this very autumn, o’ shadow and storm coming on her happy life: and, what’s more, I read to her the name the very clouds pointed out. I knew yon name was within her reach at yon time and, when she told me the shapes o’ the vision, I read it plain: an’ the dream that followed will be true, unless Providence

saves her and strengthens her mind. Mark my words, Normal, if Esmé marry an Englishman, she will find an early and a stormy grave. It has been written! She may gae through woeful days, and greet for their loss; but she is young enough to forget it all in a short span o' years. I dinna care what broken heart she may feel; but 'gin she give up her heart altogether — 'gin she exchange her Hieland eagle for one o' these English falcons—they'll tear it out, and send her mourning, friendless, tentless, to her strange grave in a——"

She fixed her eyes in fierce answering stare, as Normal flashed his upon her, and then turned away.

"Florh!" he exclaimed in a low voice, trembling with feeling, "do you really believe Esmé loves one of these Englishmen? Is it March-moram?"

"Oh, my son Normal! I hae reared you, I hae reared her; I loe you both: but I winna hae you both go astray together! A year ago, aye, six months ago, I felt Esmé's mind (as

wild and free as the winds in its fancies) would still never blow very far off frae the airt o' its early youth. My eye was ever watchfu', and my tongue ready to soother it back to the hills. What scope could she want beyond them? But the deil has sent his gales to swirl her out o' our reach: her heart and her mind are clouded in the lift to me, noo! Oh! Normal, maybe her heart is safe to ye yet; maybe it is not: it is sought after wi' deadly art. Should she gang a weary gate, ye maun no go after her; for not one o' us could bring her back: it's no in us to influence or interfere. 'Gin she goes wilfully to break *her* heart, ye'll no break *your's*, my son? I could na lose ye both. And deed an' deed, 'gin Esmé marry the Englishman, it's soon she'll run her weird!"

"Oh, Florh!" and Normal spoke with passionate excitability, ill-suppressed; "I did not think of it coming to this! I am glad I am going away: I could not bear it! I could not bear it!" Then, turning upon her with sudden

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vehemence, he continued, "But if she does not speak to you of it, how do you know? And how do you know whether he has spoken to her of love more than I have done? I have never told her I love her."

A smile, half pitying, half sneering, passed over Florh's face.

"And do ye think I don't know Esmé's face, and can't read it? me, that can read the dreams o' the brain, Normal? Aye, well do I know it; and hae seen more glances o' bonny blue cast their sheen on the glittering smiles o' the English than ever met your's, Normal. You were aye too cold! An' think ye really they never spoke of love to her? I trow you an' they will take different beats in that."

"Tell me all you know, or have seen: speak quickly to me, Florh! It's the first and last time I wish to speak of it;" and he listened, looking away from her.

"Weel, I'll tell ye the last o' it; an' that which induced me to speak to ye this day,

Normal, my son. I loe ye; and your mind must na gae deceived away to foreign countries: you shall take the truth wi' ye. Now dinna fret! ye are a man, and show a man's mind. Take the truth quiet; an' mind, above all, that whatever *he* is, *she* is but a bairn in years. Oh! the deil came riding in darkness an' blackness, haunting her dreams by night as well as by day! Where were ye? It was not like you, to lie on your fine woollen bed the mirk hours o' night that he was loupin' early by the Corrluo Hills, and casting his shadow within the very walls o' the sleeping peace o' Glenbenrough."

"Florh!"

"Aye; I seen Marchmoram, with my own een, lingering doun the steps o' the hall door before cock-crow on Saturday morn, an' me standing with the river atween us! It was no second sight, no dream, Normal! The morn was that still I could hear the gravel crinch below his feet, as he went daundering past and gazing up at Esmé's window. Oh, Normal!



she was na there, or my voice wad hae sounded and risen the laird from his bed from where I was standing! An' oh! maybe she does na even know he was there: but it's a thing I daur never, never mention. Maybe it was his own deevilry altogether. I saw him untie his horse frae the black gene tree, and then gang down to the spring; and he put some mark there after he drank." (Poor Normal shuddered.) "He mounted his horse then, and away he went at a gallop; and I sent a good prayer after him. I was raised to that degree I forgot to cross mysel', Normal; an' that's why the hoodie craws weren't howking his lips, when ye were sitting down to your Thistlebank breakfast, Normal."

Normal bent down his head upon his breast, and his fingers worked together convulsively, as he murmured absently,

"Oh, Esmé, Esmé, Esmé! You do this? Blackness! darkness!—And I was sleeping that night!"

"Gaolach!" Florh whispered, a strange light playing over her face; "there's a glimmer in the darkness. I can see it; but it's no time to tell't yet. I hae a clue, I hae a clue; a faint, faint divining thread: it may thicken on to the end and save ye baith, or it may break asunder; that depends on what I canna control—I can only wi' humbleness hold the clue."

Normal did not hear her: he continued to entwine his fingers and wring his hands silently. After a time he looked up: his eyes were tearless, but bloodshot, and the colour of his face was a greyish marble.

"Florh, don't fret for me! I don't fret for myself: not a bit of it! Let me away—away:—it's all I want." He rose up and pushed the long hair off his brow. "You said Esmé's mind was not one to be influenced or interfered with! Neither is mine; and I have made it up. I'll go now to Glenbenrrough and say good-bye there. I won't be back again: I'll leave home next week. My father allowed me

to fix what date I liked: I'll be out of the country soon."

He hurried on his plaid as he spoke. "Call Ewen to harness the horse and put in all the traps, and let him be waiting on the bridge for me: I won't stay long at Glenbenrough. Good-bye, just now, Florh. God bless you! Come to Arduashien ere I go." His hand burned, as it grasped the large cool hand of his foster mother.

"Aye! I will go after you, Normal, my son. It is you that are strong, chlan cinneadh og chlann Alistair!\* You'll neither sink 'gainst the current, nor throw yoursel' to the water-fall! Normal, success is for you; all will yet be well."

He *was* strong; he *was* proud. He stepped with quick elastic footing o'er the brown heather, and he sang as he went, low and unmusically. Florh heard the echo from her cottage door, though she knew not the words: they were these:

\* Young chief of the Mac Alistairs.

"The shallowest water makes maist din,  
The deadest pool the deepest linn,  
The richest man least truth within,  
Though he preferred be.

Yet, nevertheless, I am content,  
And think the time was a weel spent,  
And never a bit my love repent,  
Though I disdained be."

His mood changed from time to time, and took utterance in other measure of the song. With clenched hand and fierce knitted brow he sang over and over again, as he proceeded; the words grinding vindictively between his teeth,

"I lighted down, my sword to draw,  
I hacked him in pieces sma',  
I hacked him in pieces sma',  
A' for her sake that died to me."

And then, as he drew near the Roua Pass, the tones died away in softer strain: he almost sobbed as he repeated the last.

"Oh! girlie fair, beyond compare!  
I'll make a garland o' thy hair,  
Shall bind my heart for evermair,  
Until the day I dea.

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I wish my grave were growing green,  
A winding sheet drawn o'er my een,  
And I in her white arms lying,  
On fair Kirkconnel Lee."

When he came up to the base of the hill, a sudden impulse seemed to cross him: he stopped, turned, and retraced his steps to the road. Then, going by the bridge, he walked to the garden bank ere approaching the house, and when he came in sight of Esmé's spring, trickling at the foot of the old cross, he rushed towards it. He knelt down and gazed into the pure limpid stream to see if the pebbles were displaced; he parted the grass and ferns round the edge to see if they bore any significance in their luxuriant thickness, but no mark met his search: yet, when he arose, his eye still wandered restlessly; and the sun shining brightly on every crack on the wooden ledge, showed distinctly the bold pencilling on the surface. Normal saw it: "Godfrey, Friday night." He read the words over and over again: his face grew paler than it yet had

done, and with a savage cry he dashed his foot upon the writing. Where Marchmoram's hand had rested, and where Esmé's lips had pressed, Normal stamped his foot: and stamped with passionate hate. With the heel of his boot he crushed and obliterated all trace of writing: he returned twice, to feel assured he had done so, ere he proceeded to the house.

Normal had come to say adieu: he knew to whom—to Ishbel and to Glenbenrough, not to Esmé. The balance of his pride was not so unalterably adjusted but that it might be shaken; and one hair-breadth of feeling, betokening the depth of his towards her, would have been a memory to gall him ever after. Unless he could leave her with the stern last look of indifference, he would not see her to give aught gentler. No chance of parting kiss, even from her he had loved with the concentrated life-long love of his deep sullen heart, could tempt him. The kiss would be but fraternal: he would not venture his manly cheek with a staining blush for it.

He went to Glenbenrough's study, on his arrival, and hurriedly told him he had come to say farewell. It was a sudden arrangement, but imperative: the day was fixed for leaving Arduashien early in next week. They parted as father and son might do. Glenbenrough, with hand fondly laid upon Normal's shoulder, again and again gave him words of kindly affectioned counsel—parting hopes of sage future promise; while Normal stood before him with downcast head and quivering lip.

“Be true, boy! be earnest and true. Don't forget God or your country; and return to us an honour to your name and the Highlands!”

Ishbel was waiting at the hall door: she thought Normal would be with Esmé in the drawing-room, and she wished that her own good-bye should be the last scene. Even with Ishbel, Normal determined to guard against emotion: she might tell her sister of weakness, if shown to her. But he could not help himself: as, holding his hand, and pouring out sobs and fond farewells, Ishbel walked with him to

the foot of the Roua Pass, the warm, pent-up flood burst forth, and in a few burning tears he let fall, his nature triumphed.

"Good-bye, dearest Ishbel! Don't forget Normal, who has been your brother for so long. Think of me when you go rowing up the river, or climbing up the rocks, or when you go out at Arduashien to count the grouse covies on the hill. Write to me, Ishbel—my own dear, true, little Ishbel! and, when on the summer nights you are singing, 'My heart's in the Highlands,' think of me: mine will be ever there. Ishbel, I'll return some day."

He pressed her to his heart, and turned up the Roua Pass: no parting word left for Esmé. But it came at last: looking backwards for a moment he cried,

"Tell Esmé, I hope she will like England, and be happy!" then, dashing away a rising tear, he walked swiftly on.

Once again he stopped, when on the very verge of the Pass, and took a parting view. Oh! how vividly, long afterwards, did he recall



the spot, and remember it ever after. The old house beneath, the singing, dancing river, the old trees, and the older hills, all the old associations recalled by them, blended as in mist together.

On he strode again, that stern young Celt, with clenched hands, and a conquering, scornful feeling for the world he was about to enter.

END OF VOLUME II.

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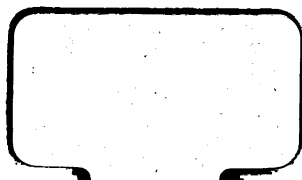








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